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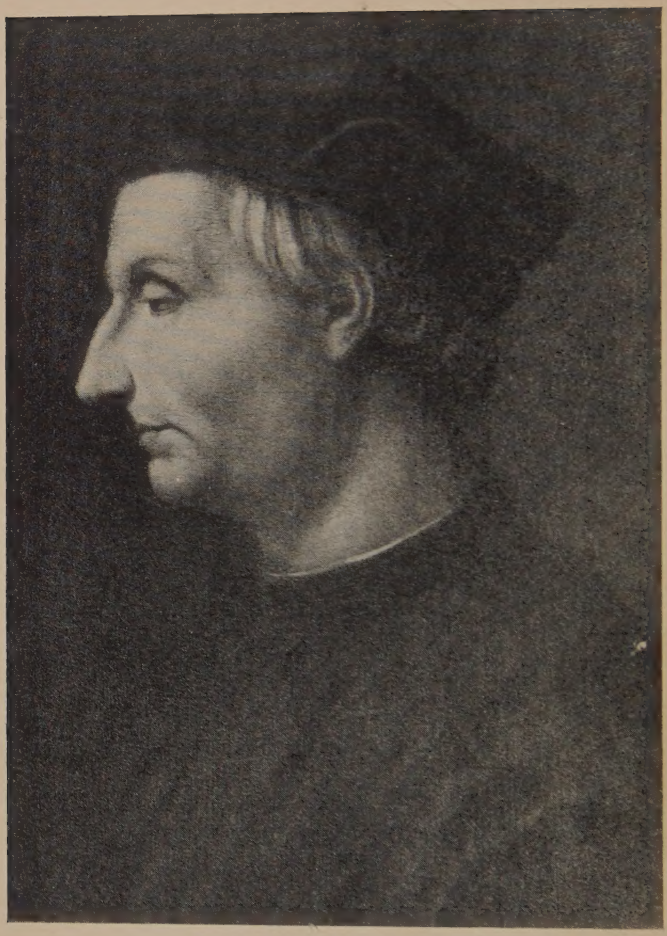
NICOLO MACHIAVELLI

THE FLORENTINE



NICOLO MACHIAVELLI

By an unknown painter (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

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NICOLO MACHIAVELLI

THE FLORENTINE

BY

GIUSEPPE PREZZOLINI

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

RALPH ROEDER

NEW YORK

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Part One

MACHIAVELLI IN THE BUD

I

NICOLO'S LAUGH

NICOLO MACHIAVELLI was born with his eyes open.

In his day to be born with your eyes open was something of a rarity. Now, of course, it is another matter and excites no comment. But all the tabbies in Santa Trinità spoke of it then.

He was born with his eyes open like Socrates, Voltaire, Galileo, Papini, Kant, Figaro and Casorri, my milkseller of Porta Nomentana, who fairly spirts guile from every pore of his skin; and like the writer of this book.

His eyes were black, so was his hair, and scant as our apologies to such German anthropologists as plant the blond crest and blue eyes of their race on every little midgit of Italian genius; and the first thing he did, feeling his chin tickled, was to pucker the skin under his nose in a budding chuckle, a quiet (O so quiet) little thuckle,

as of one who laughs no rogue else knows why.

He was born in a family of plain people, who lived in a plain little house, in a plain little lane of a street: a three-storey house with two windows to a floor, probably some old truncated tower; and it was upstairs and down there from morning till night.

His father was a lawyer and meant lawyerly by him; his mother, a psalm-singer, looked for a priest for her pains.

One day they were arguing, as argue they will, when man and wife fondly, poor fools, still fancy themselves entitled to an opinion apiece (life, ladies, being long in the learning):—"A lawyer, I'd like him."—"A priest, I'll have him."—"I'll leave him my practise."—"To the convent he goes, tut!"—At that the babe perks his head, as if to say his own say, and Father chuckles and Mother smiles.—"Mark him," Father winks.—"Mark him," Mother nods.—"Wouldst be a friar?"—The babe never blinks.—"Wouldst be a pleader?"—And the babe, hoisting his head, vents a fine little belch, a lattiloquent belch, and puckers the skin

under his nose, as if to repeat the chuckle with which he began his days.

Thus it was decided that Nicolo should study law.

Men are not to be classed thus: black, white, yellow, redskin, brownskin, mulatto, Aryan, Mongolian, German, French, Papuan, Indo-Chinese, Tahitian; men are not poets or profiteers, creatures of faith or reason, consumers or consumed, bankers or professionals, fleecers or fleeced (as in my *Codex of Italian Life*); they are not to be divided, in the peremptory tones of the bugle blowing to officers' mess, into rich and poor, or victors and vanquished, as we thought during the war; but into five categories more Kantian than those of the German philosopher, to wit, in men that laugh in *ah*, in *eh*, in *oh*, in *uh*, and in those that laugh like Nicolo Machiavelli.

Our Nicolo belonged to the race of men who laugh in *ih*. His laughter was facial, not ventral. It was head-laughter, mirth of the mind, of wit, of ideas. He could not, if he would, split his ribs,

wheezing the air from his lungs; nor exercise his intestines, harping with both hands on his belly; nor set his heart racing, pumping the blood through plethoric arteries. But his face—for he had one—kindled, his eyes sparkled, the muscles of his features thrilled with electric impulse, and with, I assure you, the merest modicum of bronchial breath his windpipe, gentlemen, emitted a barely perceptible neigh. It was a dry, dry little laugh, rare and thin, a mealy little laugh, all unlike the lasagna or noodle-laugh, abysmal, profound; or the spaghetti-laugh, trilling, prolonged; or the pastry-and-ice laugh, tonitruant, organic; or the mince-meat-laugh, croquette-and-like-figured-laugh; or the lollypop laugh, fluent and warm; or the syrupy laugh, insipid and loose; or the laugh that gurgles like wine from the tumbril.

No jaws unhinged, no navel unknotted, no belly umbilical, the skin never wrinkling: Nicolo subscribed to a meager little smile snug between skin and rind, a smile without satisfaction or solace, that never emerged from his gullet nor incommoded his vitals, mirth more akin to the squeal of the fox or the wail of the lynx, more reminiscent

by far of the goldsmith's file than of the plash-plash of the bounteous and beneficent rain.

That smile dwelt on Nicolo's face all his life. When they brought him a bit of news, or proposed an affair, or submitted an idea, the nose and the skin of the cheeks would wrinkle and the thin lips curve ever so slightly. That smile meant many things, but this above all:—What do you take me for?—Piffle!—I'd be a fool to believe you—Numb-skulls like you I've known many—and many more reflections of like resort.

II

NICOLO'S PEOPLE

I ONCE knew a worthy tailor named Misfit, and an honest cashier of the house of de Short.

Machiavelli, however, was a real clue. It clamped a number of ideas, which no critic's tinkering has succeeded in drawing. It was a good little nail, which struck and stuck. Yet his people were named Malclavelli or Malchiavelli, that is to say, bad nails, bad binders.

They came from Montespertoli, a tiny Tuscan village not far from Florence, in the direction of Siena. They had been lords of Peretola, but had preferred Florence and its citizenship. In their right Tuscan wisdom they had deemed it better to be four-hundred-and-fifty-second in Santa Trinità than first in Montespertoli, creeping burghers in the shadow of the Cupola than nobles in the Val di Pesa, and better to go on foot in the via Calzaioli than a-horseback in the piazza dell' Impruneta.

Their coat-of-arms shows an azure cross in a field-argent, with four nails in the corners, recalling the name or added, it may be, to justify it.

Little Montespertoli is thoroughly Etruscan in more ways than one. It sits on the summit of a hill produced by the rise of a seabed, all rocks and sand. In the vicinity springs of steaming water fling fumes of mephitic gas, hydrogen, carbon and sulphur, traces of that mysterious and daemonic underground realm which, rare in the rest of Italy, comes to a head here in the section of Tuscany lying between Elba, Monte Amiata and Florence; a realm of boric exhalations, mines of alum, alabaster, salt, quicksilver and iron, and thermal springs, early reputed for their medicinal virtues, which must have inspired in the Etruscans visions, legends and fancies of a richer and gayer land beyond the tomb. Fancy it may be, but until such time as the Etruscan tongue is deciphered, it is surely allowable to think of that people as a race more imaginative and haunted by the mystery of life than the boorish and practical-minded Romans, of whom we may now measure in full inanity the limited invention and fancy.

Nicolo's people, citified, became one of those half-soled Florentine families, who send their boys to grammar school and their girls to the convent to embroider; who have a fowl on the fire every Sunday; and who congregate in a cab from time to time for a drive in the Cascine, at the fashionable hour, rolling in the retelling of that excursion for fully seven days after. A servant does the drudgery she is born to, while Mother Machiavelli makes the beds, sniffs the kitchen, mends, patches, cleans and turns the clothes of her menfolk, dusts the "company" parlor, and keeps the accounts. Father is in his class or at his counter, the youngsters are at school, and in the evening the family reassembles over the steaming stew.

Nicolo's mother was a churchgoer and a trifle ink-stained. She composed hymns and songs to the Virgin and sang them with other ladies of the choir in the evening at Santa Trinità. Every evening the women of the house of Machiavelli went to vespers, and on Sunday the men accompanied them to mass.

The Italians, having seen the birth of the Catholic Church (and remembered it) are far too fa-

miliar with their altars to be awed by them. The house of God is primarily their house, a bit of a market, a theater, a school, a salon, a street-corner, a meeting-hall, a conference-table, and a matrimonial agency. In an Italian church the Almighty is far more democratic than in a French or German one. He is a God in shirt-sleeves, with, of course, a beard long and white, but a complaisant Eye, on which you can rely, if you've a story to swop, and no offense intended, Lord, no! Flush with the street, often on the same level with it, the church stands wide to walk in and out of, with no more impressive difference from the street than one of temperature. Italian and Catholic, the Almighty is no gentleman. British and Protestant, He is one, with an omniscient monocle and a face imbued with stern justice. The Father which is in Italy is an aged day-laborer, with uprolled sleeves, who looks on the labor of His Hands and finds it, as he rubs, despite certain imperfections, good.

These relations of good intelligence and equality between God and His Italians were assiduously cultivated in that day by priests, friars, nuns, sacristans and clerics of all colors. Partaking as they

did of the daily life, the friendships, family ties, public services, sharp practises and interests of one sort or another of the laity, they did everything in their power to keep well within the average and to avoid invidious eminence as exceptional figures of goodness and sanctity. In general they may be said to have differed in nowise from the average Florentine of the day, save for their robe and cowl; and neither at bed nor board, in church nor on the street, were they any worse, any more venial or swinish than their fellows.

Nicolo met his wife, in all probability, in church. There he was taken to meet her. But he married only much later, when his parents were dead and he needed someone to sew on his buttons. In 1496 his mother died: he was twenty-seven, then. He married some three years later, maybe, and in 1500 he was a father for the first time, at the age of thirty-one.

But that is another story, and you shall have it anon.

He had one brother, Totto, and two sisters: Primavera, later the wife of Francesco Vernaccia,

a merchant established in Constantinople, and Ginevra, who married Bernardo Minerbetti.

It is quite likely that his ideas, sallies, jests and paradoxes, created about Nicolo a real homelike feeling of impatience, a cluck-cluck of eccentricity. In a similar case I have known a man, eminently endowed with that practical common sense which makes his kind satisfied with a square meal and a pretty wife, say of a talented but bizarre brother, "Poor boy—a top in his attic!" Of Nicolo, we may be sure, they said as much. Nicolo had "a top in his attic." And it is that little top which, spinning and spinning, has brought him, down the centuries, all the way home to us.

As for the others, brother Totto and his sisters Ginevra and Primavera, with their husbands and issue, we recall them only for Nicolo's sake. They are the dust of that little top, whose spinning has made such a stir in the world.

But of Nicolo's father I can tell you something more—I knew him a little better.

Nicolo's father, then, was one of those substantial middle-class citizens, faintly tainted with cul-

ture, who are married and die by the rites of the church, men for whom death would be but a beast's, without a priest at their pillow and a clerical turnout to trapse, taper in hand, to the churchyard behind them; and woe to the frock so refractory as to refuse his Guild and its banner a blessing, albeit that banner bore Giordano Bruno for patron; but who cordially detest all monks, nuns, and priests, outside their functions, as drones, and are always on tap with anticlerical stories, which they run on every occasion with a high, huffish smack of scoff and scorn.

Anticlericalism in Italian society is the ferment of sanity in the popular mind, in times of priestly dominion or abuse: a manner of stench or sweat, which serves as symptom for the political physician of what is transpiring within. Whatever its form, fable, jest or theory, clique, party, poetry or demonstration, its source is always the same.

Florence, for ages a Guelph city, had time and again been in conflict with the Pope; and at this period Savonarola was again blowing on the brazier of that never-ending feud.

Accordingly, when of a winter's evening Nicolo

sat before the great hearth smouldering with a dying fire, he would hear, between the lines of his Livy, as he turned his back squarely on the debates of his elders, the hymns of his mother to Mary and Jesus alternating, antiphonally, with the anticlerical tales of his father.

These tales, or *novelle*, were an old Florentine custom and, as their name indicates, nothing more than news—the news which travelled from town to town, born in some Oriental arcade and returning to its birthplace, garbled and retold some ten times or more on the way, ferried by sailors and traders and changing in name and form at every port.

Now, among the first of these *novelle* that Nicolo heard and long remembered was the one about Frate Timoteo. That lad, you must know, was a minor brother in a church close to the house of the Machiavelli, the house to which they had returned some years after Nicolo's birth; and he plied his trade in the church and on the adjoining street, attracting an affluence of the faithful to an image reputed to have bestowed many favors and wrought many miracles in the past. Brother Timothy was as smoke in the eyes of Father Machia-

velli, who suspected him of haunting the house in his absence and wheedling coin, cheese, oil and wine from soft-hearted Dame Bartolomea.

As to his sanctity that unsuspecting lady nourished no doubts; but her husband made it the butt of his fiercest shafts. Zounds, madam, did ye never hear how he kept a wench in the convent? Lie low, lay-brother! Ha! Ha! Nor ever hear tell how he tricked a hussyhot husband? Tricked him to a tryst, he did, and there, in the dark, in lieu of the lady bespoken, hands him his speechless wife! Meaning, he swears, to reconcile them! And Brother Monk had had his toll-penny too. Ah, ah, we're all human. Ha! Ha!

But best of all was when the maid, and by-and-bye the neighbors, brought in the latest lay of Brother Timothy.

On the little square in front of the church rose the house of Messer Nicia, a none too shrewd and very aged doctor, less doctor than dunce, alas, who had taken to wife a beautiful creature named Lucrezia. The fame of her beauty had spread so far that from Paris a youth named Callimaco Guadagni, domiciled there in exile because of the wars and

ruin of Italy, had returned to his native land, to see her. And, seeing, he loved lustily.

Lovers have ever been sharp knaves and to gain their ends, what, I ask you, will they not do? Messer Nicia was maddening for a son; he had made no end of vows and all vainly; so that now he was thinking, notwithstanding his avarice, of conducting his wife to the baths.

This fissure found, Callimaco succeeded in slipping his scheme through it. He and a sly friend of his, who lodged in his purse and led a gay life there, put their heads together, with a bald pate between—that of Frate Timoteo, who was the lady's confessor and her mother's, a woman as godless as friend husband was gullible. These three together, Callimaco masking as a foreign doctor and Timoteo with his religion, persuaded him that there existed a drink capable of fertilising a wife. But woe to the man who first lay beside her! He would die, infallibly, within the next few days.

Messer Nicia craved that son at all costs, but naturally he did not want to propagate him with his life. The conspirators then suggested that he put his wife to bed with a lad as antitoxic; and if

he woke in a better world, why, God save the proxy!

To Messer Nicia the heavens had opened, and he embraced the scheme; insisted on leading the search for a proxy, whom they lit on, by the most fortunate of chances, that very evening, as he came strolling their way. Thus it was that Messer Nicia brought Callimaco—virulently antitoxic—to his wife, undressed him, laid him beside her, and assured himself with his own hands that everything was proceeding as he had planned.

Frate Timoteo had put his shoulder to the plot and he had been reekingly rewarded for it by Callimaco; and now he went about boasting that he had obtained of heaven the boon of a son for Messer Nicia, who, a year later, with his puppet in his arms, acknowledged the debt and paid grudgingly for an oft-recurring mass of thanksgiving.

With such scurvy tales Nicolo's father distressed his poor wife, a lady mightily nettled, as you may imagine, to hear her holy friar thus maligned. And often and often he regaled his cronies with the tale of that draught of "mandragola," the name which the conspirators had given to the potent beverage that had made a proxy of Messer Nicia.

III

THE PASSPORT OF MESSER NICOLO MACHIAVELLI

Passport of Nicolo Machiavelli
son of the late Bernardo and of Bartolomea di Stefano Nelli;

born: in Florence, May 3, 1469.

occupation: Secretary of the Committee of Ten on War and of other Delegations of the Florentine Republic (from June 19, 1498 to November 7, 1512).

height: medium.

shape: slender.

eyes: black and bright.

hair: scanty.

forehead: broad.

mouth: small, with subtile lips, and a smile naturally *Machiavellic.*

cheeks: prominent like those of cats, lynxes, apes and other cunning animals.

divers characteristic markings of the skin.

civil condition: married to Marietta di Bartolomeo Corsini.

Seals and official visas of frontiers passed and destinations arrived at:

Piombino, Forli, Siena, Rome, Pisa, Arezzo, Mantua, Ferrara, Perugia, Assisi, Senigaglia, the Kingdom of France, the Swiss Confederation, the German Empire, Verona, Piacenza, Civitavecchia, etc.

IV

THE STREET

LIKE all good Italians, Machiavelli learned much from the street.

In the street Nicolino played, ran, romped, frolicked, fought, plotted, was partisan and leader; in the street, the Italian street, which is the natural extension of the home and the first schoolroom open to the small boy and his craving for knowledge. Nicolino played hide-and-seek, blindman's buff, tag, tops, tipcat, quoits, seesaw, football, hare-and-hounds, forfeits, slap-the-dunce, jumping-board, standing on his head, touch-iron, hot cockles, cuckoo, pillory, castles, checkers, draughts, boxing and catching, hide-the-hat and last-man-out. Nicolino was acrobat, actor and dancer, a bladder-blower, a builder of puppets, a deviser of decoys, a retailer of stilts, pop-guns, drums, pinwheels and Jack-in-the-boxes; and Nicolino was a slick little polisher of balls and tablets. A hundred times he

drew lots for his followers to the tune of "Under the arbor peeps a grape. . . ." Odd numbers and even, on his fingers he found them, long before he learned them by arithmetic. In weights and measures he was versed, credit, debit, profit, by a long-standing trade in pennies and pens, pencils and plumes, nuts and reels. Troops he levied and councils held, issued orders and passes, supported tyrants and combined conspiracies to overthrow them. Prince he played, and priest and friar, and man-and-wife, and ambassador. He published his first compositions on the walls and pavements of Florence, with chalk or a nibbled pencil; there his first invectives appeared, his first judgments on his fellows, his first messages; there he wrote his first "Florentine chronicles."

O monuments of a mapless nation, *O monumenta italicae plebis*, who ever will assemble, from latrines and lobbies, loggias and walls, law-courts, police-courts and school-rooms, limned with so many lively lyrics, breathless stories, burning politics, domestic accounts, violent invectives, and aching pleas; who ever will assemble you, anonymous

voices and scriptures of the nation, inspired by boredom, anger, peril, oppression, vanity and heart-felt pain?

To that great collection Nicolino Machiavelli undoubtedly contributed. On that roster he first signed his name and scribbled his first portraits, which were portraits of Things As They Are in Borgo Ognissanti, Oltrarno, Borgo Pinti or Canto de' Nelli; irrevocably lost now, more's the pity, and scholars know them not, because they were not written for Popes and Humanists, for Societies and Officials, Princes and Booklovers! And Nicolino learned to mask his face before ever his thoughts, for Carnival. He knew all the intrigues of the quarter, saw all the flotsam and jetsam of pimping friars and godly women and ludicrous lovers and goodmen gulled, the madcap wives and gluttonous parasites and cozening servants and wheedling laborers, the little faith of all men and the first examples of that great game played by Fortune in her whirligig wide, which he strove to represent in his Comedies and to record in his Chronicles.

From the street, the markets, taverns and warehouses, he picked up the native terminology, the saucy salacity and tickling turns of phrase, the ungrammatical ellipses and synthetic adjectives of the Florentine vernacular, which made his prose famous and which moved the Florentine Chancery, even in his own day, to smile and meditate. He loved those words, he loved that vernacular; he defended it and held it superior to the dialects of other Italian towns, their foundation and model; and he found them ever the scurvier the further they departed from the Florentine, and in the way of scurviness worst of all those foul-mouthed Lombard bastards, and those Sicilians, whom he would not even recognize as Italians.

But, as he grew up, the streets of Florence had other sights to show and other words to teach Machiavelli; such as:—Death to So-and-So! Hang him, hang him! A halter, a halter! Hands up, Hypocrite! A load o' shot, a load o' shot! Long live Which is What! Hey for Christ, Christ is King! Down with the Friar, down with everything!

Note, too, that at the age of nine he saw the

lynching of the Pazzi for the attempt on the life of Lorenzo de' Medici, at twenty-five the entrance of Charles VIII into Florence, and at twenty-nine the death of the Friar.

V

HIS STUDIES

NICOLO MACHIAVELLI, moreover, was certainly sent to school to learn Latin. We know that he learned it fairly well, and learned it without benefit of Gandino's *Exercises* or Signor Schultz's *Grammar*. Latin was learned in those days with Latin and a ferrule; with plenty of Latin and plenty of ferrule; with much memorizing and more translations. Reading and rodding: in those happy exercises school days were spent. Those who learned were few. Some went daft, and fancied themselves translated to the days of Brutus, conspired against tyrants, princes, priests, assailed them with knives, summoned the people to liberty and awoke too late to the fact that the people did not want liberty.

In the Latin-tub one would drown, another emerge dropsical, and yet another, like Machiavelli, would sprout fins and gills, turn fish and frisk, dive and disport himself in that element as in

his own. We feel the habit of composing in Latin even when Nicolo writes Italian,—Italian, or as his friends would say, Etruscan, that is, Tuscan. Latin became second nature to him. He wrote Italian Latin-wise, a little like a sailor rolling on land in memory of the heaving sea.

Livy, Cæsar, Cicero, Tacitus, Suetonius—they were all at his fingers' ends; and Virgil as well and the amorous poets, Ovid, Tibullus, and Catullus, to whose erotic adventures he was wont later to compare his own.

But he was too clever to become a scholar. What he imbibed from these men was their sap and spirit, not their habits of expression alone. Accordingly his contemporaries had no high idea of his learning. In Varchi's judgment he was "letterless more than lettered," and Giovio held him to be a man of brilliant talent but entirely self-taught, lacking all regular education, one who had learned whatever he knew from Marcello di Virgilio Adriani.

His family had set his feet on the way of eloquence, but instead of a flowering cabbage to season the Sunday roast, they found that they had

drawn a prickly artichoke. In those days letters could be made to pay. The Italian man of letters was developed then and has continued to render service ever since. To-day the writers on finance and economics are taking the bread from his mouth; but up to the present century the Italian man of letters has proved himself a cultured hack, ever ready to support a client's cause.

Machiavelli's family was attempting to recover certain holdings in Fagna contested by the family of the Pazzi, and all their hopes were set on Nicolo, who seemed to give promise of becoming a flourishing and vociferous lawyer, capable of cajoling the mighty, of flattering their weaknesses, of setting one foot on the steps of the seat of their vanity and the other on that of their interests, to loom large and gain their consent. The first of Nicolo's writings that has come down to us is, in effect, a document of this nature, addressed to a certain Cardinal Lopez; it begins with grave maxims, religious principles, declarations weak as water, and numerous bootlickings, and winds up limply with a plea for the holdings in Fagna.

Latin was not Machiavelli's only study. The

writers in the vulgate he likewise held in high esteem and read with ardor. Among these were Dante and Petrarch.

In Dante he could hardly be expected to admire the *Paradiso*. And even less the *Purgatorio*. Whereas he certainly appreciated the *Inferno*. There he felt at home, among people he knew and esteemed. The *Inferno* is all passion, energy and intelligence; it is the abode of Francesca, Capaneo, and Ulysses. Now young Master Machiavelli too had dallied with love and had known its sins and excesses. He was no sentimentalist, but some few lovers' tears he dropped there. Anyway, he liked the strong men, the stout hearts, the hard heads, he met there. His heartfelt admiration went out to the man who wanted to *know*, to go to the bottom of things, to understand human nature.

Whether he pored over the riddles and rebus, the brain-fags and involved locutions of Dante-lore, no one knows. Maybe he did. If so, a vice common to many may be forgiven to one. But his love of Dante had far other foundations.

In Dante he felt, as we feel to-day, the spirit that breathes through the whole poem—his scorn

of all pettiness, his aversion for those who abstain from the fray, his loathing and horror of the miserable spirits of such as pass through life, neither living nor dead. When Machiavelli is at a loss to express his contempt for the leader of the democratic party, Pier Soderini, who instead of defending the Constitution of the Republic played the gentle and law-abiding victim and let himself be ousted by the Medici, he boos him out of Purgatory, Hell and Heaven and boots him into the Limbo of Infancy.

For Machiavelli to be a child, or a child-at-heart, was no encomium. Nothing was further from his temperament than the Christian spirit, which deifies the child for its innocence. On the cover of one of his books never look for a Luca della Robbia's chubby cherub: rather the face of Rodin's Thinker, head in hand, or Michelangelo's Julius II with menacing hand raised against the Bolognese. Machiavelli and his works require a face on which thought and experience have left their furrows, and vice sooner than virtue, the face of one who has paid his own tribute to the creation of the universe.

VI

MARCELLO DI VIRGILIO ADRIANI

HE was the arch-type, this Marcello di Virgilio Adriani, of those professors literarily laurelled who, being either unwilling or unable to teach, find themselves a snug berth in the government. In them the pedagogic uvula is fully developed in all its desirable dimensions, but they exercise it not in the classroom but in the halls of government, where ceremonies are celebrated. This Marcello of ours was called in for baptisms and funerals or for any other eloquent or semaphoric occasion, such as the consigning of a Commander's baton to a general, or the inauguration of a new Trade Union, or the opening of a Hospital or Mutual Aid Society, or a Congress of Women in favor of The Vote. Lungs he had, and a belly abundant to ply their bellows; a face impressively void, wreathed in a patriarchal beard, and all the appearances with none of the substance of dignity. Doughty,

with a broad forehead, a pair of fine eyebrows, transparent and obtuse, behold him; behold that forearm and its sweeping gestures reaching to the last row, farther than his words can carry, behold how it fires applause, when at the end of a peroration it smites the table resoundingly, and through your spyglass you note the mouth closed and the face uplifted in expectation of the forthcoming and irresistible cheers.

Those were democratic days and he was in high favor with the mighty, of whatever party they might be. He had offended none and hosannahed all. Hats off to the dead, hats off to the living, a word for the ladies, respect for the rich, an accurate memory for everyone's titles, and an ever-ready willingness to scribble a word of recommendation for a novice.

Latin and Greek he knew well and had enriched the world with various translations, among others one of Dioscores, for he was not wholly wanting in notions of the medical art. But letters and speeches were his *forte*. The very man, you see, for the mighty, who were often hard pressed to compose an epistle of sufficiently amiable and innocuous

character, when they had some embarrassing and transient guest on their hands. He enchanted them with the music of his rolling Latin periods, his reminiscences of Greek and Latin authors, his brazen flatteries likening them and their labors to those of the men and enterprises of antiquity. In proletarian periods he rinsed his mouth with the demagogic gargle of Liberty, paraded his popular principles with toga-esque flourishes, flung the banner of Progress to the breeze, and compared the mercenaries of his day to Greek captains and the merchants of Florence to Roman senators.

If the government changed and Populace gave place to Patrician, his praises were sung to another text but still to the same tune. From Marius he passed unaffectedly to Sylla, from Cæsar to Pompey, and from Demosthenes to Alexander. The greater Florence, empire, expansion, the race, the irrevocable future of the fatherland, all found in him a fervent apologist. Republican Rome being worn pretty threadbare by now, he cut himself a new coat from the Imperial Purple.

If ever he spoke his own mind honestly, he would say, I assume, that Man is not a reasoning animal

nor a political one, nor the only laughing animal, nor the one animal blessed with an immortal soul, nor the only erect mammal, nor the only beast not dumb, nor a simian with prehensile thumb, nor a featherless biped, nor a worm born to evolve an angelic butterfly; he would be inclined, I fancy, to discover as the essence of Man his mutability, his being susceptible of swift shifts at elections and easily moved to change parties. Man, in a word, he might have said, is Me. I, my friends, am Man.

This resonant and perforated reed piped from its spineless holes at the bidding and breath of the breeze, whistled or sang as willing this way as that, with unruffled satisfaction and never, in its inclining, a twinge of embarrassment. Nor embarrassment none felt those who received his eulogies, though their duplicates they had heard sung for their adversaries.

This personage was no master or mentor, not Nicolo's tutor, for sure; but a friend; and he was instrumental in obtaining his appointment as Secretary to the Council of Ten on War, with a salary of one hundred florins a year, a stipend inferior to that of the other Chancellors.

VII

THE ROMANS AS HE SAW THEM

NICOLO was thick as thieves with the Latin writers, by night and day. The Greeks he read in Latin versions. He read Polybius, Herodotus, Plutarch, Thucydides, Diogenes Laertius, Curtius Rufus, Xenophon, Aristotle, Cicero, Sallust, Suetonius and Horace. He read and reread them and made marginal notes. He would rise and stalk the room, repeating aloud a passage he found noble. He would read and pound the table. He would read and smile. He would read and weep. He would read and sing. His reading was the taking possession of a territory he knew to be his own, the feeling of a native air, the recognition of a mountainside or a housetop irrefutably his. It was not the light traveller's reading of one who rolls through a strange land, but of one who returns home. Rome, for him, was home. His own home town, really, was Rome. His true fellow-citizens were Romans.

He survived sorrow like a Roman. The Romans he knew by sight. They were larger, stronger, healthier, abler than the Florentines, or the Italians, or the French, or the Spaniards. A bit like Swiss. They were stouter, taller, more robust, vigorous, earthy, enduring, substantial. A bit like Germans. They crossed frozen streams. They bore burdens. They made war. And never shammed.

A Roman blow was worth two French blows, four of your Spanish, ten of your Papal pricks. The Romans had five stumpy fingers. Nails ribbed with earth, when they set out to conquer a king or subdue an empire. Their legions left a reek of sweat and garlic behind them. Where they set foot, they put down roots.

They were not pap-fed on the creed of Christ. This world was the world. There was no other. And inasmuch as this world was all the world that was coming to them, they believed in making the best of it, while it lasted. They were not enervated by the thought that all is vanity. The glory of the world was not an empty word for them.

When they commanded they expected to be obeyed. When they made war, they killed, burned,

ravaged, depopulated, crucified, exported peoples wholesale, like merchandize, and sold them like fowl at market. They crushed or wheedled their foes. Their friends they made sure of with gifts and fear.

All in all real reliable people: hustlers and go-getters. They'd kill their own sons, to save Liberty. They never haggled over the necessity of extraordinary provisions. Grave crises they met with grave measures, new issues with new parties. And they ground under their heel goodness, humanity, courtesy and respect of law, for Country's sake. For Thee, my Country Dear, they would have sacrificed their very souls, if the soul had happened to have any value in those brave days.

The Romans always reasoned before taking a decision. They reasoned without demurring or hemming-and-hawing. "One of two things; if this, that; if that, this. Which is best?" They reasoned with balance in hand and weights ready, decision on the scales, and they chose the one that tipped them—the weightiest.

Such were the Romans up to the time of the Gracchi. The Romans that followed were far less to the

taste of Machiavelli. They were too educated, too artistic, too cultured, too philosophical. And as for those that turned Christian—ah, pass on in silence. That was a dismal hour. The Emperors turned their faces to the dark instead of to the sun. The world went back to the cradle and turned craven; and there was no way found since of restoring it.

VIII

HIS FLORENTINES

STONES whistling, and hordes of boys pouring from every alley. The fight is on, boys, the fight is on at the bridge. Oltrarno against Santa Trinità: three to two in favor of Oltrarno.

Machiavelli's town was hot with ancient partisan hatreds, old family broils, the unending schisms of shop against shop, saint against saint, trade against trade. Those who wound hemp looked askance at those who wove linen; the goldsmith had it in for the goldbeater, the wool-beater for the wool-carder. Between the old settlers and the new, suburbanites and city-folk, there were grudges. Cowl hated hat; and fashion itself was a division.

But, as if this were not enough, quarter fought quarter, precinct precinct, one ward the next, each door the other.

To be born in the via de' Bardi or under the

Cathedral was to be farther than the Seine from the Spree. A trifling difference of gait, accent or idiom raised a smile and words.

Blunter the battles of the boys, fisticuffs, stones. At the drop of a hat hordes would stream from the narrow streets onto the Lungarni or over the *piazze*. The missile of David, the missile of Balilla, sped straight for the shins, the shoulders or the pate of a foe.

That day, then, the battle was on at the bridge; and hand over fist from Arno's shore drew the little stones made expressly for civil war, the rocks heaped high by the fall of the waters and rounded by their long roll in the river-bed.

Arno never built Florence. River-pills build no piles, no walls. The river-pill is restless; immured, it fidgets, drills a hole and, one fine day, the whole structure crumbles. Hard grey mountain-rock that holds, cement or no cement, you must have, and slate, to build a house and roof it. Turn to Fiesole with her hilltops scraped, hollowed and bored, for all the palaces and towers of bland stone below. She is dear, very dear, old Fiesole, the mother-ward. She has given all, the Gods, statues, palaces,

and lastly her own hilltop, when there were no more ruins to ransack.

But Arno is dearer by far, for she gives the little pellet of civil war. Your Florentine has no love for the Pratese, he hates the Pisan and abominates the Venetian; and worse than these the transalpine rabble and the overseas scum; but words can not utter what he feels for a fellow Florentine. Thrilling, aye, to let fly at a Pisan from the battlement and see his heels flip his head! But what is that to the deep voluptuous satisfaction of driving a pike through a Florentine, stringing him up from the Palace, and razing his houses to the ground?

The river-pill is for civil war. It is round, to fit the hand; hard, to greet the foe; heavy, to cut the air. From a tower-top or a window or a street or one side of the square to the other, the very thing, gentlemen, to settle a civil argument.

Stones were flying that day on the bridge of Santa Trinità. The whole Oltrarno was up in arms. All its brigades were mobilized—the hodcarriers with arms of knotted muscle, shying their flints like the fleetest of arrows through the air; the rope-

benders, with legs like columns from ankle to thigh; the tanners, with lungs sound from long laboring on leather; the armorers, who pound steel flat to match it with sharp; and the wool-beaters, wielders of the rod, to whose iterated blows the wool rises, swollen whole.

Nicolo was watching the brigades from a window, the ebb and flow, the tides of battle; the fiercest driving on under the hail of stones, lurching at a foe, catching him by the middle and flinging him over the parapet into the Arno; some were already in the water, one was clinging to a ledge, his limbs swaying like reeds in the wind. Shouts of *Carmine, Carmine!* met by howls of *Santa Trinità! Trinità!* Everywhere confusion, no one to direct the fray.

One day he had wanted to join his gang and do battle for Santa Trinità. He too had shied stones, he too had rained blows; but soon he had wearied of that shock of brute forces, without aim or control, so inferior in effect to their efforts; and he had proposed to some of his neighbors a diversion, running around by another bridge and coming up behind the foe. He had read something of

the sort that day in Livy, and the time was ripe, he felt, to emulate a Roman captain.

But his neighbors had not even listened to him; they had gone right on shooting, shouting, and cursing with glee when a stone or a blow had tumbled a foe or put him to flight. Then, when he had insisted, they had said to him, "Aw, who told you to talk, eh?"—and, as the battle anyway was ending to their disadvantage, had turned on him and given him a drubbing for his pains. One of his acquaintances had said to him later, by way of balm: "Give 'em the air, Mac! Can't you see they're ignorant—that's what they are?"—Nicolino was observing from a window the deeds of prowess, the unreasoning flights, the curious panic which at times seized even the boldest, the general confusion, the inrush of hordes, when there was no need of them; he was observing and thinking.

"These are my Florentines, my people. I know them. I was born here. Father and Mother too. A famous lot. Know how to talk. What tongues! And what a tongue, the Florentine! Best in Italy, best in the world—that's easy. Say it in Florentine, say what you like and just as you like. Clever dogs.

Nicknames for everything. Men for everything. An answer always pat. With their little words teamed so neat, swinging by, eye-to-eye, like soldier-boys! That's the Florentine! Lord, what a land! Good soil for the plant named Man. Best in Italy, best in the world—that's easy. Which is, come to think of it, a sorry world. Must see a bit of it, before I die. Going to the dogs, everywhere. Italy worst of all, poor Italy! And why? Because it's full of Florentines, full of people, I mean, who know how to talk, talk well. Talk well and act like—well, here, look here, now, at the bridge. A hundred boys, a hundred heads. All commanding. No one obeying. Each a leader. None a heeder. Each with his own idea. And each idea—that's the worst of it, Nic,—each idea sound, intelligent, logical, plausible, well-put, well-planned. . . . But—hundreds of them. How to choose? Captains all. Poor Italy. Poor Italy: poor world—Italy leads the world. Leads and lags. First to talk, last to act. First, first, first. Last, last, last."

IX

ITALY

IN the few years preceding Machiavelli's appointment as an employee of the Commune of Florence, Italy had enjoyed a period of peace under Lorenzo the Magnificent, arbiter of her States.

Lorenzo de' Medici was a great political apothecary, who had put the country to sleep, not knowing how else to cure it. The sedative he concocted was known as a balance of power.

The balance of power was a drink compounded of five ingredient egoisms—the green of envy, the yellow of bile, the black of fear, the red of arrogance, the blue of vanity. Its final alchemic complexion was one of rosy-hued hope.

Taken in the evening, it assured a sound night's sleep; but in the morning the patient awoke with a sour taste in his mouth, a bilious liver, a burning heart, an overheated brain and bloodshot eyes. His hands twitched with greed. And an inclination to snap had grown overnight.

Lorenzo dead and the balance broken, the five major States snapped worse than ever, and at their heels fifty little minor States, and behind these five hundred sub-communicules depending on them.

Italy in those days was a stagnant swamp, on the surface of which little scabs of viscous matter formed and melted from moment to moment: each scab a State, each State a nucleus, each nucleus a ringleader. Every man for himself and all against each: was the common policy.

Lorenzo de Medici had been a kind of Giolitti with, however, the instinct of an artist. He was stronger in diplomacy than in statecraft. And even as an artist he was a good deal of a Giolitti—too cautious ever to be very profound. Those whom he could not crush he caressed; and, when he was the weaker, he was obsequious and surrendered. He had an excessively low opinion of men—as low as his opinion of women. Professing a contempt for the politicians of his time more profound than that which they entertained for him, he managed to win them all and persuade them to observe a general truce.

Those years of truce were a paradise for Italy.

Our sons, said a contemporary, will hardly believe what prosperity Italy enjoyed and how singularly blessed was the state in which the Italians then lived. All historians agree in noting a sudden sharp swerve for the worse in the course of Italian affairs after Lorenzo's death. The age of iron succeeded the age of gold. The ruin that ensued was ruthless and instantaneous.

What of the cities of Italy then?

The cities of Italy, a battleground without shelter or boundary, were in constant travail of war, insurrection, embroils innumerable: divided, oppressed, overrun, beaten, plundered, assaulted.

The cities were divided into sects, parties, factions, families. The cry was for Marco, now for Antonio, now for Colonna, Orsini, the Church, anon for San Marco, the Panciatichi or the Cancellieri, one for the Palle, one for the Friar. Those who cried Antonio were as good for a Marco, while those who cheered Marco were rehearsing Antonio under their breath. Time after time these distempers bubbled, and, if the lid were not in

firm hands, boiled over. There were always plenty to gain by a change. A call to arms, and they rushed into the streets, where the political fortunes of the city were settled.

Attacked and defended, occupied, surrendered and re-taken, the cities passed from hand to hand, ever in fear of far and near, of the first passer-by, the next to promise, the latest to threaten. Every party had its unruly spirits, quick to rebel, let but a banner appear without the walls, or an enemy detachment, or over the battlements an armed head scaling a ladder. There was never a gate its guards would not yield, never a pass they would not consign, never a castle they would not surrender. An obstinate defense was rare. Ten, a hundred, three hundred men were an army. A ladder, a ram, a tip, sufficed to force a fortress.

And the leaders? The leaders sprang up, developed, conquered, crumbled, sprang up again, conquered again, crumbled again, and vanished. They were all alike. They hung, quartered and beheaded. They were hung, quartered, and beheaded. They made treaties and broke them; took cities and lost

them; oppressed populations and quit them. Among one another they were forever playing a game of puss-in-the-corner; no sooner was one man "out" than all the others combined to keep him out, but if he slipped into a corner, they joined him in keeping the new loser "out." They schemed and stole, hired soldiers, raided the enemy's territory; then they lost, fought their late mercenaries, and raided their own grounds. The soldiers passed from hand to hand like pawns between banker and gambler, accumulating in little heaps now in front of one and now in front of the other.

Unity?—in no city. Every town was broken up into sects and parties, factions and families. One man had his ambition, another his son, a third his goods, a fourth his honor, to vindicate. Those who were in office feared those who were out. Life was a continual up-and-down of destinies bubbling like beans in a pot. Life was like a bonanza, a perpetual racing and slipping for the prize, to a sibilation of envy, as one fell faster than the rest from a height a little higher than the rest—a height, poor dud, not high enough.

Shame to lose, not fraudulently to win; and not

to undermine with an enemy a momentary ally, improvident folly . . . since the ally of to-day might well be the enemy of to-morrow. But the ally and the enemy, having hit on the same idea, had already come to an understanding. Each thought himself a mite more astute than the next, and in this competition of rascalry, caution, cunning and betrayal, what happened was a good deal like people punctiliously bowing before an open door: "Pray, sir, won't you enter?"—"No, my dear sir, no, after you!"—till they tread on each other's toes to push in, where there is room, and room enough, for all.

And Rome?

Rome was *caput mundi*, the world's latrine, headquarters of the universal leprosy. It was a country of gang wars, imposing ruins, puddles, chronic malaria, general filth, luxury and beggary hugger-mugger neighbors. Witches were burned there and in the Vatican there were courtesans and astrologers. There Luther was excommunicated and Christ sold by the hour. A continual congress was held there of pimps, gluttons and rascals, in-

nocents and saints. To the better contemporaries Rome was Sodom, Gomorrah and Babylon rolled into one.

The Pope had his minions, his sons, his concubines. He would fatten his cardinals to slaughter them, when they were prime with coin: jingle-bell, jingle-bell, report in hell. The cardinals had sons and nephews. A price for every ware: canonicates. bishoprics and papacies sold and bought like melons a-market, like cakes on the curb, in return for a political boost or a woman's kiss, like gewgaws and finery. The gold of the world in loads flowed in, and in vats rolled out.

Certain Popes loved the table better than war. Others loved the sword better than women. Others preferred gold to fame. And yet others held art above gold. But none loved Christ or remembered Him.

A Hebrew, notwithstanding, came to Rome and was converted there. Consulted on the motive of his conversion, he replied: "If this religion can survive so many and such rude outrages, it must of a truth be divine."

And Italy?

Italy—*l'Italia bella*—beautiful and naked, under a veil opulently embroidered, lay on her couch waiting, like a harlot, the lustiest brigand or the highest bidder.

X

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE PAZZI

WAR, pest and revolution have reinstated Death in the esteem of men, in the esteem that was rightfully his for ages.

In the final quarter-century preceding the great upheavals begun in 1914, Death was little more in the understanding of men than a word in a lexicon or a literary property. Peace and sanitation had long been undermining his domain. Death, indeed, was still, as of old, a reality, the only final reality in man's life; but a decent and veiled one! Surrounded with precautions, his graveyards located out of bounds, his pests overcome and his famines unfanged, Death was a spectacle all too rare. And Life seemed a gift capable of fruitful and full expansion.

To trace Death it was necessary to travel, to take a jaunt into Africa or the Far East, where his triumphs had sought asylum.

But in Machiavelli's day Death was a continual by-stander, a solemn "presence." The dead were everywhere, in the streets, in churches, at palace-gates, on the towers of the towns, on the mirroring waters of the rivers. The "stiffs" were not honorably shrouded, as to-day when a man dies; but often naked. Stiffs with mortal hue and mortal stench; publishing the putrefaction of the flesh; or strips of human matter on the street; or in disembowelled rot left to the larking of urchins; or horrid inflations rolling, water-logged, down a stream. Regular wars and recurring pests, unending feuds, annual revolutions and sporadic brigandage scattered them broadcast about the world. And life was lived driftwise, in dodging search of some current not directly deathwards bent.

Political struggles were more perilous than nowadays. Not a mere matter, you see, of a snub in Parliament. More than a ministry at stake. More than a free motor or railroad pass to lose. More to land than a municipal election or ensuing sinecure in a bank.

Life itself almost always was at stake. The loser

paid with his life. The winner won the life of his rival. That was a point not moot, admitting no debate, no repining. You knew what to expect. You knew too well to complain, when the game was up and the bank claimed its credits.

Among the first of such losers whom Machiavelli saw were the Pazzi. The Pazzi, the Mad, were they indeed cognominally mad, those Pazzi—Salviati and Bandini—who in 1478 attempted the lives of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici, killing the latter and wounding the former in the Cathedral of Florence during High Mass, at the elevation of the Host? Or were they not?

Centuries have elapsed, and we have learned since how to live. We are now vastly, vilely, boringly knowing. We know that to fight for freedom is madness. In our condescension we call it a generous mania, but mania, but madness, none the less. We know that the people do not want freedom. Freedom, the instinct of freedom, is an aristocratic sentiment, lofty and difficult, and few are born with it, as few are born poets or ethical or in any way gifted, believe me. We know that the Pazzi were actuated by ambition, by personal grievances

against the Medici, by rage, by a devil of upheavalishness. We know that it is easy to kill a tyrant. We know that his slaves set off straightway in search of another. We know that a Tyrant is not a monster but an unfortunate, long-suffering and much-to-be-pitied great man, who has to take on himself all the sins and suffering of his fellowmen, to lead his people where they would assuredly not go, if they knew whither they were bound. We know that at certain hours the people are possessed by a need of being led and commanded, and that at those hours they want to obey, not to reason—not to discuss or consider or raise problems or worry or entertain doubts, but merely to accept what others decide for them; and that then a Tyrant is useful, necessary, beneficial, providential.

We know . . . we know . . . But what do we not know? What do we not know, mellow as we are with the centuries, odd fellows even with time, ripe with experience, with all things acquainted? we who have catalogued everything, analyzed all things, added and closed all our accounts?

Strange, though, passing strange, that Machiavelli knew what we know, unhesitatingly and with

absolute certainty, when the rest of the world knew it not.

In Machiavelli's recounting there is a symbolical and monitory signifiance in that scene of Jacopo de' Pazzi, the oldest of his tribe, sallying forth on the piazza della Signoria at the head of a scant hundred soldiers and summoning the people to freedom and his aid. "The people"—says Machiavelli—"were made deaf by the largess and riches of the Medici, and freedom was unknown in Florence. The Signori alone, who commanded the upper portions of the Palace, greeted him with stones and labored as they were able to alarm him with threats."

(N. B.—with stones: the pebble of Arno ever-present in Florentine chronicles.)

"And Messer Jacopo standing uncertain"—Machiavelli continues—"he was thereupon encountered by Giovanni Serristori, his kinsman, who first reproved him for the unseemly scandals by them provoked; and thereafter urged, how it behoved him to take heart and return to his home, liberty and the people being, he assured him, dear to the hearts of other citizens as to his own."

(A man of great moderation and good sense, that Giovanni Serristori.)

Now, what for Pete's sake was that liberty, to the call and conquest of which the Pazzi summoned their fellow-citizens? Those Florentine shopkeepers, later ennobled under the Grand Dukes, had no intention, certainly, of sharing the government with the people. No. What they understood as liberty was merely their and their family's turn at office and public honors, the apportionment, by a kind of rotative injustice which, in the long run, became justice, of favors and bounties to their own relatives and allies. They were cliques, favoring popular elections, provided they themselves were elected, and they hailed the Medici as tyrants, because the Medici saw no necessity of providing for minorities and their yawning wallets.

We know now that the Tyrants represented Progress and the modern State in opposition to the Mediaevalism, which was still rampant, seething and fermenting in the communal Florence of the time.

We know that the Medici were in reality genuine Liberals, emancipators of the people proper from

the grasping oppression of the flourishing and prosperous people—the *popolo grasso*. But we know so much!

Marvelous, though, that Machiavelli knew it, then.

He saw the death of the Pazzi. He was nine at the time. His account of it is no second-hand tale learned from hearsay, but an actual contemporary event, seen by his own eyes.

His picture of Francesco de' Pazzi passing to his hanging, naked, beside the Archbishop Salviati, between two savage mobs, torturing and insulting him—"nor was it possible to make him say any the least thing soever, but steadfastly regarding them, without otherwise complaining, silently he sighed"—is like that other picture of Vitellozzo advancing to meet the Borgia, "disarmed, his cape lined with green, and sore afflicted, being, as it seemed, well aware of his imminent death."

Both were primarily "things seen." Only later they became "Florentine chronicles."

XI

THE WAR WITH THE FOREIGNER

MACHIAVELLI saw Charles VIII in Florence.

Before the arrival of Charles VIII in Italy, politics and war were for the native a kind of predetermined and fraternal game—tug o' war, see-saw, tag—from which the contestants always emerged whole. At the worst, they had lost a few thousand florins and a town; but both were easily recovered at the next match.

The only thing that mattered was to quit before anyone was exhausted. Whipping was fair, but extermination—no. That would have been the end of the game, the wonderful game of war and politics.

Venice and Milan, Lucca and Pisa, Siena and Florence, the Papacy and the Empire, Genoa and Savoy, had reasons for rivalry; none so strong, however, as to make them forget that an ally's aggrandizement was worse than an enemy's competition. As soon as one tottered, the others were ready,

by an alliance, a betrayal or a mediation, to revive it.

In such practise the political knife was whetted, whetted very fine. It was a blade so thinned on the whetstone of talent, that it looked less like a knife than a scalpel, and less like a scalpel than a razor. Politics was an art of insurance and prevention, treachery and inoculation, of digging so many snares for the foe that it was as much as your life was worth to pick your way through them without falling in yourself. To the princes of that day it was enough to be able to turn a clever reply, write an eloquent letter, put up a good game of bluff, weave a fine snare, keep court with panders and harlots, lord it with their subjects and outwit their conquerors, and to wallow and rot in idleness and ease the rest of the time.

The Italians played their own politics and paid others to fight their battles. They were too clever to hurt one another. In trade they made money, with money they bought captains, with captains came soldiers, and with these they made war. But as the captains were no fools either, they soon realized that the longer the war, the longer their

command. As of lawyers and causes, so of captains and wars—"While the goose hangs high, There is time enough to die."

These "nomadic kings" wandered about Italy, looking for stabler kings to employ them; and in approaching a prospective employer, it was with an expression difficult to define, whether a beggarly whine or a brigandly "Your money, my master, or your life!"

Thus, between captains and soldiers in all camps, there had grown up a kind of tacit understanding, far more valid in the politics of that time than any explicit pact. Save in cases of personal animus, the captains never attempted to conclude a war; the soldiers fought politely, without hurting or killing anyone; and the conclusion, indeed, is irresistible, that they devoted all their attention to doing no damage, when we consider that after a whole day of fighting the field had but one corpse to boast, and the casualty in that case caused by crude horsemanship.

For one of these freebooting captains, there was no darker day than that of victory. The graft was over. It was customary, however, as a kind of

sop, when a captain had conquered a town, in lieu of a farewell dinner, to let his troops sack the place. And, however dainty in battle, the soldiers were anything but backwards in booty—casks were drained and women plugged up, the rich rifled and steel paid for gold, and they burned and broke into houses and churches and laid shops and palaces waste with practised skill and implacable impartiality.

If a city were defended too stubbornly, blood flowed; and because it had broken the tacit rules of make-believe war, it was subjected to those, far from tacit, of real war.

War then was a farce in the field, and in victory, tragedy. And it was always a matter conducted by Princes and Republics for reasons of business and concluded, of course, as a deal.

Now it happened that an Italian prince, Ludovico Sforza nicknamed the Moor, broke a rule of the game. The unwritten rule said:—Never call in a foreigner. This is an all-Italian match.—Ludovico felt himself threatened in the possession of Milan, which he was then occupied in subduing, neither

more nor less illegally than any other Italian prince, at the expense of his nephew, Giovan Galeazzo. His efforts, however, aroused the jealousy of his neighbors, and particularly of Piero de' Medici, who threatened to form a league against him with the Aragonese of Naples.

This cake to carve, Ludovico decided to call in a French cook—Charles VIII, King of France.

Vainly the Italian princes sent him embassies, imploring him in the name of Italy, whatever he did, not to do that. He replied—Italy, eh? What is Italy? I hear a good deal of talk about it, but I have never seen it.

In fact, no one had. Italy was all well enough in poetry, and actors could improvise interludes on the subject. But Ludovico was no poet. There was just one thing that Ludovico knew, and that was his "home-town," and he meant to have it and hold it. Piero de' Medici could bluster as much as he pleased about calling in the Turks; he went right ahead and called on the French.

Charles VIII of France was a Romantic born before his time. He was frantic for glory. A mad-

man, maybe, with an *idée fixe;* but madmen on thrones have sometimes been known to be great kings. His mania was to set foot in Southern Italy and from there to try a flight into Palestine. He wanted to repeat Charlemagne and Saint Louis.

He entered Italy in 1494 at the head of an army mighty for the time. He had bought him some Gascon and Swiss soldiers, many gentlemen burning with a chivalric spirit of adventure, and was bringing along forty pieces of cannon, culverins, serpentines and falconets—a thing quite unheard-of in that day and undeniably redoubtable. Before him lay Italy and the Italians and their (less unheard-of) fear.

He came marching with drums and fifes, banners, bowmen, musketeers and marshals, his foreign devils arrayed in ranks, each with its own uniform and arms in distinct and regular formation. In regular formation, too, the harlots of France followed these well-organized ranks. The discipline of the French, even more than their cannon, impressed the Italians, who were accustomed to improvised militias, street fights, the bloodless

battles of their days of brawl, and the sacks that shut up shop and sent the women scurrying to the convent at the first alarm.

Savoy gave him the key to the Alps, Ludovico that of the Appenines, and Florence, Siena and Rome money, supplies and compliments.

The first to oppose him was the little town of Fivizzano. It was taken by the French, sacked by its neighbors of Fosdivino, and its inhabitants put to the sword. Instantaneous panic in the cities of Italy; they could have withstood him, but what they could not resist was the impulse to fling him the keys of their castles and hail him—the Foreigner —as the liberator and protector of Italy.

Through Italy he made his way, *l'Italia bella,* with beaming face and eyes like saucers (his boiled-fish eyes), airing his big nose, with a lance on his thigh like a *conquistadore,* striding a magnificent steed or hoist on a throne, lest the Italians laugh, as laugh they did, at a man so small; ushered by his foreign devils who tramped ahead, chalking up the houses where he and his retinue might best be welcomed by the loveliest ladies in the land, the richest gentry, the highest prelates,

the most populous mobs, and feasted amid a rain of flowers and the display of rare vessels and tapestry. His banners read: "By divine will, sent by God."

Fra Savonarola had foretold his coming as that of another Cyrus, come to castigate Italy for her sins.

Italy, past mistress in pomp, outdid herself that year and undid too what she had done. Wherever he went, Charles was met with rousing fanfares, the most brilliant parades, the clergy in full canonicals, and floats with allegorical figures, and lights in the windows (on pain of flogging) and lords with keys and smiles to bid him alight, and baldequins, and tapestries emblazoned with the golden lily on the balconies.

A few days later the rain of flowers might turn to one of stones. But that Charles was to learn only on his return. This first trip must have left him a very pleasant memory—a charming *souvenir d' Italie,* as they say on the conch-shells of Venice.

When Charles set foot on Florentine soil, Piero, most abject of the Medici, took fright, ran to clasp his feet, offered him, as a gift, the fortresses of

Sarzana, Sarzanello, Pietrasanta, and Livorno, entry into Florence, two hundred thousand florins and the hospitality of his own house to boot. Tuscany, in short, was his for the taking.

Such puling terror struck even the most prudent Florentines as excessive, and a prompt riot put him and his family out of the city.

Whereafter Charles, bedecked for his triumphal entrance into Florence and threatening with French arrogance to sound out his trumpets, if his demands were not met, was informed by a Capponi, as cocky as his name and cockier than many a crest, that the Florentines would sound out their bells and be damned to you, King. The king was no end romantic but he realized that those Florentine pebbles might prove too hard for the pates of even his braves, if they had to file through narrow streets, between tall palaces and towers; remembered that his artillery was a day's march behind; agreed to a reduction in the requested coin; made a neat play on the name of that cocky Capponi; dealt out promises galore; assumed the title (which cost him nothing) of defender of Florence and its liberties; and, after buzzing a few days, twixt

yawning and scowling, from Florence, as God willed and Savonarola strenuously urged him, took himself off to conquer the kingdom of Naples. That kingdom fell without a blow, amid huzzas of the rabble, obeisances of barons and the flight of kings. The very weather went over to him: the winter was milder than usual. Pisa had already surrendered, overthrowing her hated Marzocco and raising a statue to the French King. And that is how King Charles conquered Italy.

But Italy is a curious country. The Neapolitan holiday was hardly over, when the States which had let him pass without a cannon to say him boo or a hero at the hilt of a dagger, rebelled and formed a league to expel him. Charles then made what homeward haste he might; pop went the kingdom of Naples, and bang came the barons back, the rabble hailing their erewhon ruler with another holiday; while Pisa overthrew his statue and continued for her pains free of Florence—Florence and her friar being now a common mock. And the French historians who followed the army of their sovereign observed that "it is the nature

of this people of Italy ever to favor the stronger."

On his homeward journey Charles scattered promises and coin with royal abandon and bore up bravely under some twenty thousand bales of booty, among which were many books and pictures, for, robber though he was, he was a robber of taste and broke into none but the best shops.

At Fornovo, in the Val di Tiro, an army of Italian allies was waiting for him. They were all there, from the Pope to the Venetians. They could have routed him. The battle lasted barely an hour, and it was the first real engagement offered by the Italians. It was as good as won. Victory in fact was so much a foregone conclusion that the mercenary militia made straight for the spoils, and the French army had time to escape. Charles returned to France under the ban of excommunication, but he was so pleased with his tour, that he planned another for the next spring. A slip on the steps of one of his castles killed him: ingloriously he died, and nothing done.

After Charles others discovered that Italy was beautiful, weak and willing as a courtesan—French, Germans, Swiss and Spaniards. They

poured down upon her, ran right and left, invaded her valleys, scoured her towns, forced her cities, fought on her plains and down her streams, filling the land in season and out with fire, sword and hitherto unknown tribulations, with blood and bastards. Ever and again this or that Italian, this or that town, this or that State, would rise, revolt, ring the tocsin, face the French or Spanish in open fight and gain a victory. Singly these Italians were brave, collectively cowards; one by one, no race in the world so graceful, but ranked, the raggedest platoon you ever laid eyes on; one by one, teeming with talent, enough to make an Italian of an ultramontane fool, but all for one the world's very nonesuch of nonentities.

And that is how Machiavelli saw Charles VIII pass through Florence, lance on rowel, to the cheers of a swinish crowd and those sly *signori,* wryly smirking.

XII

THE PROPHET UNARMED

WHEN Machiavelli stands at the window and looks out on public life, he sees the heyday of Savonarola's theocratic tyranny below, successor to the tyranny of the Medici. Lorenzo's political equilibrium is over, and so are the blithe public balls that went with it; now the world wends its way contrite and musing, every man on his own and, what is worse, his neighbors' sins. The women's frocks sweep their feet, their locks are braided, their shirts high-necked, their sleeves long, their eyes downcast. The beauty-shops are bankrupt. The hair-dressers are going out of business. The night-clubs are clandestine. Dancing is pleasure, pleasure is sin, sin is forbidden. The very boys, who used to romp and make the Florentine street ring with carefree abuse of their parents, have become boy-scouts of the Lord, and now go about snooping out signs of vanity and extravagance, to burn them on

the pyre, ardent practisers of that heavenly nuisance of prying.

Gerolamo Savonarola and his followers, the *piagnoni* or wailers, were premature Christian Socialists. They wanted God and the People arm in arm; peace with victory; Pisa without bloodshed; the Church re-edified; honest politics. They sent delegates to Peace Congresses and reduced the military budget of the Republic. They had even offered Florence to Jesus, in sign of their bleating pacifism, appointing him King of their Republic.

The first letter by Nicolo Machiavelli, which has come down to us, concerns Savonarola.

Nicolo makes his bow to history with a page, which shows him to have been already completely developed in 1497—a full-grown cant-nipper, a clairvoyant, a looker-into-the-bottom-of-things. While kings and rabble, artists and statesmen, swallow the turgid eloquence of the Friar, gulping down that rank brew of obscure vaticinations, seditious rebukes, fables, dreams, mysterious symbols and vague prophecies, he shows an unswerving resolve to discover the actuating interests that underlie that magniloquent thunder and to judge

every action by its effects. He weighs in the scales of practical truth the "lies" of those highly-colored sermons, their inspired misstatements; and he observes that they change with every change of regime. That is enough for him. Evidently he suspected a charlatan in the friar; but in that he was mistaken.

Savonarola was not to be understood, he was to be sensed; and in Nicolo's make-up that intuition was lacking, sealed no doubt in order that the rest might remain open. The Florentines felt and, like all peoples, understood nothing. The people felt and followed the lure of the obscure, mysterious, demoniac element that was in Savonarola. For us, after the lapse of so many centuries, it is impossible to understand what virtue lay in those hortatory indigestibilities, which impressed so many men so deeply that they were ready to give their lives and even their money for the Friar. With all due respect to Savonarola, it must be said that there is no wading to-day through the ponderous volume in which Villari and Casanova have made a digest—a digest, mark—of the cream of his sermons, without liberal leaps on the way. All that

we can remotely divine lies in certain forcibly phrased prophetic utterances, which coincide more or less with his effective invectives against the Pope, and which are to be taken often as cryptograms, with contemporary keys, so distant and dark do those biblical allusions seem to us.

True, I grant you, that a tumbler-full of obscurity is worth more in gulling mankind than a barrel of clarity. Savonarola's is not the only case in history. What is remarkable, though, is that, amid all the muddle-headedness prevalent in Florence at the time, amid so many passions and conflicts and overheated fancies, a young man who had every reason, politically speaking, to side with the Friar, should stand firmly apart, disbelieve every syllable, weigh him as a political factor and, finding him wanting, clearly foresee that in the ordeal of fire he would go up in smoke.

With what infinite scorn he must have looked on the prophet idolized of his Florentines; of that scorn we feel the full weight in the nickname with which he brands all who, like Savonarola, have fired men with ideals too lofty for their innate mediocrity, all who, remote from present reality,

have proved incapable of willing the means by which their ends could alone be realized; all such he has called Prophets unarmed!

Even then Machiavelli's mind showed a sanity well-nigh indecent for that day—a sanity so unusual as to be therefore a malady—poise positively insane. There is something almost unearthly and alarming about it. It is utterly and unmistakably different from the scepticism and political hostility of Savonarola's opponents. It is a high astral wisdom, radiating a cold even light. Its rays reach throughout infinity, touching with their inflexible illumination and impartiality the immediate event, which is then moving, exciting and confusing men. But their source remains remote, distant millions upon millions of miles.

When we ponder this first performance of Machiavelli we see him already fully developed, armed and, I should add, at the same time disarmed by his potent intelligence and by an enormous capacity for attracting hatred and incomprehension.

It is as if we saw him in the church of San Marco, in the dim recess of one of its naves, erect, watching with his sly little smile the profile of

the Friar, as he thunders from the pulpit against priests, tryants, harlots and doctors, calling the wrath of Heaven down on his enemies, and laboring with the devil of righteousness that is in him to turn the world back for centuries. Savonarola was the Middle Ages, Machiavelli was the modern day, which not even his own day could understand.

Savonarola expected everything from God. Machiavelli expected everything from Man.

Part Two

MACHIAVELLI IN MEDIAS RES

I

IN OFFICE

THAT a man of merit should be preferred, in a public election, to four nincompoops is fully as notable as that a man of honor should be preferred to four knaves; and should, in the nature of things, be proclaimed to the world with salvos of cannon and peals of bells.

There were no cannon, however, and no bells, the day that Nicolo was elected by the Grand Council Secretary of the Republic of Florence. A few ballots less for four rivals, and Messer Nicolo succeeded a certain Alessandro Bracceschi in office.

History, who is an unaccountable creature, has left us the record of those names and that date. It befell on the fifteenth of June, 1498. Preposterous pranks she records and momentous events she forgets.

Machiavelli, accordingly, entered the service of his country by the back-door. Fourteen years later

Guicciardini entered it by the staircase of honor, nominated out of hand Ambassador to Spain.

Secretary of the Republic of Florence is a title, which meets the ear to-day with an ingratiating, impressive, eloquent sound. We seem to see the scowl of the Lion of marble and to hear the whirr of the banner of the immaculate lily. Before us stands Machiavelli, grave, glum, compunctious, with level eyes and oratorical gestures, opulent with velvets.

Not so. The truth is triter.

Machiavelli is an employee who climbs day after day the little staircase of the Palazzo della Signoria; who carries his lunch in his coat-tails, the early bird's market-crumbs, beans and cold meat; who is paid less than his colleagues; who stands in a great room, chilly in winter, with a brazier between his feet, scolding to keep warm; who wears cloth cuffs, to save his sleeves; who addresses letters, and when the contents are urgent, adds a neat little *post-post-haste*, as we would a special delivery stamp; his first duties consisting in fact of drawing copies, making transcripts, compiling minutes, digesting reports and annotating official files.

Guess again: Machiavelli was no Conte Tornelli or Baron Romano Avezzano in a sumptuous Embassy, but one of those modest, ill-fed, ill-clad little Roman stool-warmers "of the secondary grade," who grub along at the beck and call of seven or eight *Cavalieri,* three *Commendatori,* and one *Excellency*, until, after a year or two, one of them realizes that the man might make a passable mouthpiece and entrusts him with a report, or a mission maybe, a report the *Commendatore* signs, a mission the *Commendatore* concludes, when the spade work is done.

It is plain, I say, as plain as mid-day that Machiavelli was a punctual subordinate, who stole no time from the State. And there is a symbolical fitness in the fact that such an Italian, whose first thought was always for Italy, should have been a functionary, conversant with stamps and seals, book-keeping and protocols.

He was attached, specifically, to a Committee of Ten on War. The office was a busy one; it drew money, dealt orders, mobilized men, dispatched couriers, marched artillery, bought gun-powder, moved munitions and food to the front; shifted

sheriffs and guards, banished constables, governors, deputies; compiled lists of men and paid bills calling for care, copying and comparison; and all on the dot, for the Florentines were close and democratic to boot, which means that they were always going through their pockets, where money had been paid out, even of many years standing, and woe to the man who could not show proof—as Giacomini the hero and Guicciardini the sharp both learned to their sorrow.

Well and good. I don't mind my Machiavelli taking orders from ten *Commendatori*. In Italy the humble have always done better than the mighty.

Better so, say I, better so, knowing how it shocks those pundits of the cafés, who would scorn to lead for one day the life Machiavelli led for years; who are always ready to offer the country a plan of campaign, or a disinterested tip on true politics, or an article, or an oration; but who can not write, for the life of them, a decent address on the envelope of a letter; or tell their pocket from the public's; and who come to work at eleven in the morning, explaining in a stage whisper that they had a little

something to do for a great lady or a minister—and let no one pry further: secrets of State or of honor!

In a few years Nicolo's life had changed. In 1496 his mother had died, in 1498 he entered the public service, in 1500 his father died, in 1503 he married and became himself a father. The old stock of the Machiavelli had shrivelled; the new shoot was sprouting in a new soil, flowering and bearing fruit. And it was in these years that the writer began to bud.

On Machiavelli's desk we find the Latin authors, some official files, and a basket of pears, fresh from the villa, which he is saving for his boys and his flirts; but look closely, and you will find some scribbled trimeters, relating the history of Florence in the last ten years, and some snatches of dialogue, very mortal to friars, priests, burghers, big-wigs and boobies: the *Decennale* and the *Maschere*.

But his tongue is sharper than his pen. His speeches, his sayings, his whacks are the life of the office. Over Florentines, neighbors and aliens he cracks a curt whip.—Heigho, out comes the harem, Biagio would say, as his friend took the floor. For

Machiavelli the human race, and in particular that part of it with which he happened to be acquainted, was a Circe's circus, its stalls stocked with all kinds of beasts—your lions, your wolves, your bears, your buffalo, oxen, elephants, leopards, panther and deer; and your job-lot of mongrels twixt ass and ape; not forgetting the swine, with snouts deep in slime. Those beasts were men—men he knew, his next-door neighbors, and, what's more, his masters. They were the *Commendatori* of that day, babbling Democrats, bleating Socialists, senile Conservatives, rotten little despots all, without backbone enough to be noxious, incapable of fundamental good or ill, limping forever in half-measures and stuck in the mud of their prejudices.

But the office leads a new life, when Machiavelli alights: in runs Tom Florentine, nosing the world for news; and the word being that life is worth living, straightway, at that news, the veterans convene to chatter and prove it, to tattle and backbite, to plan some hoax, to meet that evening at the house of an hospitable trollop. Outlet there must be, amid the grind of grave duties, and the buoyant Florentine temper struts for relief, in defiant

disgust of dull neighbors: a necessary airing, when the world weighs too heavy, and the wage-slave seeks the back-fence for his freedom to fool and to criticise. Our cronies chat freely of the Pope and the Jubilee, of the Friar and miracles, scoffing the sanctimonious, chewing the cud oecumenical on woman and one in particular, who looks for Nicolo's homecoming every evening like a hawk from her eyrie; telling smutty stories, playing backgammon, babbling of the Grand Turk and the Emperor, blackening one another with the nastiest little words that ever soaped tongue, rallying their wives, who are always breeding and up on their hind legs for a dress or a trinket, or the whereabouts of a husband, or a dowry. And so with drum and fife they rout dull care and whet their wits on how the world runs away. Without this Machiavelli in homespun, a little unbelted to-day and a little psalmodic to-morrow, the other Machiavelli would be unthinkable, he of the velvet and vair, who reads and reflects calmly and coldly, tempering his mind with comparisons of ancient and modern politics. The irreverent antics of those merry-andrews, who were minded to live a bit counter the clock of

the captious, were an excellent corrective for the loftier Machiavelli, wrapt in the correlation of remote contingencies and political laws, eternal as those of the stars which Galileo was later to discover.

In that company Nicolo was wont to relate his travels and launch his political maxims and mottoes, which by way of the back-door went whistling around town. For example. He had been with Pope Julius II, accredited by the Republic as an observer of his stormy reconquest of temporal power.—Papa Giulio! Papa Giulio! Lucky beggar. Always falling on his feet. Never saw the like. Marched on Perugia, held by Gian Paolo Baglioni. Too weak to take it. What though? Walks into town, all unarmed, sir, with all his Cardinals, sir. And there they are, like rats in a trap, all the princes and wealth of the Church. And Gian Paolo, he knows well enough what they come for: it's him or me now, thinks he, it's him or me, I take it. Well?—Machiavelli smacks his lips. Would he hesitate? Ha! Ha! Not he!—But that pea-shooter, that beanbreeder, that piece of cheese goes down on his knees like a good, gentle, obedient son of

Mother Church, yes, sir; and instead of beheading the Pope and his whole College of Cardinals and making his hold good and his name famous forever, lets himself be meekly cashiered and a Papal governor set up in his room. O Lord! O Lord!—There were some things Machiavelli simply couldn't stomach. —Now if he'd been a holy boy, Gian Paolo, serve him right—or a hypocrite like Savonarola, well and good, old pussyfoot, now he was wily—but Gian Paolo! A sinner as patent as Satan—liar, thief, assassin, incestuous—uh! The day a heaven-sent chance comes to do one of those great deeds that illustrate a man's memory forever, he turns yellow and funks Fate!—Valentino, huh! Valentino would never have funked Fate!

This way of talking, so ill in accord with the feeling of the majority of Florentines, must have earned Machiavelli many enmities. His tongue was not for civil service. His pulse beat too hot for a Florentine, and sometimes he would ease himself by building a world, where all things should run athwart this, to the utter confusion of the so-called decent folk and democrats of his country. He wrote down some of its rules, and I reprint them here,

for the delectation of the reader; adding merely, by way of signpost, a level-headed caption.

Discretion. *Whosoever, or man or woman, shall fail to blab in one day what is done in this Company he or she to be punished in this wise; if woman she be, her shoon to be set where all may see, with a placard at the feet inscribed with her name; or, if man he be, his hose to be hung, inside out, in a conspicuous place, and of all men beholden.*

Modesty. *If to any man it seemeth, or any woman, that he or she be too comely, and two witnesses be found, the woman shall be constrained to show her leg four inches above the knee; and for the man, he shall satisfy the Company whether or no he wear a kerchief in his codpiece, or other like thing.*

Secrecy. *When man or woman of this Company begin to say anything, and the others suffer themselves to be stuffed, let them be stricken with what penalty soever he please, that first set the tale afoot.*

DEMOCRACY. *All things to be deliberated in this Company, which the lesser number of the assembled shall be agreed upon; and the lack-favor ever to gain cause.*

PRATTLE. *No man neither may nor shall hold his peace in this Company, but more he prateth, and all together, more shall be commended; and whosoever first leaves off babbling shall be so put upon by the rest of the Company, that he shall even render account wherefore he so holdeth his peace.*

PRECISION. *Those that are of this Company shall never dare pleasure one another in no wise; but being requested for a favor or errand, shall make answer ever by the contrary.*

Along with these larks, however, which in men who were forced by the times to write in code may have had some direct satirical purpose that is lost to us, he was training his pen to weightier labors. He had acquired a certain reputation with his superiors by his letters, his descriptions and the advice sent home from his missions; and his opin-

ion was consulted on enterprises of importance, such as the war against Pisa or the treatment of the rebellious populations of the Val di Chiana.

Florence was perpetually embroiled with its neighbors, whom it had overpowered or was planning to strike, to clear the seas or the landways for its commerce (the lungs of that republic of traders). The idea of associating those subject cities in their fortunes as their equals never occurred to even the liberal politicians of that day; and Fra Gerolamo himself, who thundered for the liberty of his Florentine flock, implored Heaven to hand over the Pisans. Every age, of course, has its own political maturity, and to reproach our ancestors for not reasoning like ourselves is provincial patronage. That being so, Machiavelli had been pondering on the best way of making Florence mistress of Pisa and the Valdarno; and his reports show that shrewd practical wisdom, that clear insight, that rapid and unclouded power of decision, which are the outstanding traits of his thought and his style. His consultations contain no lengths, no bedside humors; they diagnose and prescribe, going straight to the point and the cure. But for anyone familiar

with the turn of his mind it is easy to read between the lines all those caustic comments, with which he must have enriched them, when he composed them —interlinear addenda for the benefit of those Councillors of the Republic who could never face a fact squarely. For Machiavelli's principles are always plain and few; his reasoning knows no dilemmas or compromise; and his conclusions wait on no favors.

Will Pisa surrender for love of us? No. We must use force. And how? Thus and so.—How are we to hold the Val di Chiana? By fear and by favor. We must favor those we can trust, and the rest we must have the courage to extirpate. All half-measures are weakness, error, crime.

Maxims so sane must have dismayed the majority of the Councillors of the Commune; and only a meager minority tolerated Machiavelli, holding him well in check, however, and judging his ideas sound but excessive and the man honest, no doubt, but extravagant. He must be heeded *cum grano* and handled with caution.

It is an old story—history teems with its fellows. Comes a sage, and he seems mad, while the medioc-

rities, being mediocre, deem themselves sane. They take his idea and whittle it in half: only so can they grasp it. If it fails to work, they lay the blame on the sage, who created it whole, great and viable, and they call it the idea of a visionary, which would never have worked anyway.

Florence was full of little Machiavellis. They wanted what he wanted; but they lacked his courage and insight; and they cut his proposals in half.

And Machiavelli? Well, he blinked a bit, hoped a bit, cursed a bit; but he kept his heart up, racketing with trollops and potwallopers, who knew what they wanted anyway, and never did things (that ever I heard) by halves. Deal him a knave or a ninny, and Machiavelli cried, Knave! Deal him a Soderini or a Valentino, and he drew—Valentino.

II

BIAGIO

IN the Chancery, anyway, Machiavelli had found a public, and the man that touted him loudest in Florence was his assistant, Biagio Bonaccorsi, himself a quilldriver in the service of the Signori. He had conceived a profound admiration and affection for his colleague, aping him in his caustic ways, his rough-on-bluff dicta, and those ribald little tickle-tales which he went around telling, almost in his sleep, in the most verminous terms of the Florentine vernacular.

Biagio Bonaccorsi was one of those men, whose race is not extinct, especially among the employees of to-day, who love a clever man and who, more capable than many who run with the crowd of recognizing real merit, if chance brings them into contact with one, dedicate themselves to him with a dog-like devotion, content with a little attention, however vouchsafed, be it but a whistle, an errand,

or even a swift kick. In their mediocrity the radiance that emanates from their idol imbues them with something like a halo. In a symbolical fresco we should work them in, in the lower left-hand corner, kneeling, of course, and crowing at the rise of their Saviour, marvelling greatly how things do happen and yet, you may be sure, expecting it all along.

Biagio Bonaccorsi was a clerk, copyist and digester of the orations of the Signori, and not always an exact one. Sometimes Nicolo would note a slip and write on the margin, half-fondly, half-frowning: *Blasius mentiris*, Biagio, not so, not so. Biagio bore all with saintly patience and when Machiavelli was absent, he was the first to cite his letters, to defend his interests, to boost him, to hoist him on the palm of his hand; thrice-happy, for all favor, if Nicolo wrote him an occasional line, be it but in request of a bonnet or an errand to Marietta.

Once, when Nicolo was away, a charge of which he was ignorant was raised against him, the work of an enemy who made his deposition before a notary, masked, as one could then do: an obscure and shameful charge, touching his birth and that of his

father before him, supposedly illegitimate. Biagio gets wind of it; warns his friend guardedly; recommends him to his well-wishers; digs out the amnesty and exception by which he may profit; buttonholes lawyers and go-betweens, who can make and unmake a ruling; and bespeaks them so much better than Nicolo could do that, in short, he saves his friend's honor and position.

Biagio was no mighty mind, he had little culture, he was pusillanimous, he was poor, and he could boast no powerful relatives or connections. He was a lowly copyist, a poor "Stradiot" of the Chancery, as he liked to say, but he had a great heart, greater than many of the mighty of his day. Summoned by the infinite and inscrutable designs of Providence to serve the mighty Nicolo, who was quoted so low in his own time, he managed to cheer him with his humble, faithful and unselfish friendship. He was his right hand man, he fell into disgrace with him, he was distinguished by the same decrees which in 1512, after the fall of Pier Soderini, dismissed from his rank and pay, banned from the Palace and his domicile in Florence, and confined to his villa of San Casciano, Nicolo

Machiavelli himself. In the law-Latin jargon in which his dismissal is couched the name of Biagio Bonaccorsi is also specified and—ossified. We are not likely to forget it.

He left a chronicle of Florentine doings from 1492 to 1512, which is to the Histories of Machiavelli what the little Mountain of Bologna is to the Alps, which rise on a clear day, far far away, shining with everlasting snows. Some have even thought it Machiavelli's own work—and may God forgive them for thinking! But Biagio has his place in history: he was no mighty historian, but he showed an humble sense of duty toward one whom he knew for his better, and whom he asked but to serve, and he was happy to exercise his own great humanity in lowly acts and useful services for him who outshone him by all the divinity of the mind.

Good Biagio! Where shall we look for you now? You soft-hearted scold, who, like the bull-frog of fable, were so fain to rival my Machiavelli in sententiousness and perspicacity, and who kept step with him in labor and stress, in caper and kick, and who fell no great way behind him in shuffling secrets of State and of skirts?

My blessing upon you, most excellent Biagio Bonaccorsi! More than one I could name to-day, who like you will go down to History for those same virtues of a loving and long-suffering hound.

III

A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK

BRIGHT and early, for a start, Nicolo finds his lunch-box packed. Marietta will not have him spending the few poor pennies he draws from the Government in an inn. She has been up and prepared: four boiled eggs, two *panini gravidi* (what nations deficient in sexual fancies call *sandwiches*), a nice round slice of goat's milk cheese, and a flask of native wine. The flask is a gourd, late a pumpkin. Its skin is mottled like a zebra's; and to hear the wine swish in that belly, why, it does your heart good, so cool, so cool, with the sun, as it will be, straight overhead.

Anyone who has done the by-ways of the Tuscan hills knows the highway of Machiavelli's day.

Reader, if you don't like by-ways, by Heaven, you are no man for me and for you, I may add, this book, as you see, was not bound. If by-ways bring no memories of meadows by the way with no

ditch by-the-bye, and inroads under trailing vines, and plundered grapes, and posies of flowers, and laurel boughs crowning your old hat, and halts in the shade of a poplar, and chats with a by-wayman, up or downward bound—why, man, you are a poor man o' your feet, a hugger of the common highway, that's all I can say, and it's plenty. A fig for you! Read no farther.

But if you do, you must be stirring. The summer is hot hereabouts, and whichever way you take them, the hills must be climbed. There they are, to the north, to the south, San Gaggio or Trespiano, as soon as you leave town, a rise, and it's as well to have them behind you, in the heat of day.

In the forenoon, in fine weather, and especially if it has rained the day before, the hills around Florence fret the sky, one like another, with clumps of cypress, pine and oak, and crowns of villages and castles. The road is not tedious. At every turn it offers new vistas. Here a river-bed, dusty with drought; there a gorge, full of rock and slate, like a mountain-side; then a wall, bounding a wood; then a meadow, hedged with hawthorne and by-and-

bye a margin of dwellings. Shade follows sun, and sun shade, and breezes blow by you, heavy with the scent of mown hay or the moisture of a woodland. The atmosphere is never dead, and on the dullest day you have only to climb a crest, between one valley and the next, to thank the effort for a whiff of sweet air.

By the way you meet peasants, shouldering a mattock or a hoe, or driving their cattle to market; or, on holy days, in procession, a droning priest herding a flock of women and children at his bannered heels. No milestones mark the road, Roman-wise, for soldiers and Cæsars, but little tabernacles, where the wains find shelter in a downpour, true trysts for the talkative; and wayside inns, where the price of wine is chalked on a board with naughts as many as the pence required. Toward town you meet, and edge by, coalmen and their tottering mules; and shepherds with blue sunshades and green, behind their flocks. You come out on a hilltop, and far below lie the plains in checker-board squares, yellow with turnip, green with clover, blond with grain; with great triangles of dusky cypress and greenoak, slit by a road,

or thinned by a clearing conical with gloom.

Clambering at the feet of the castles, dismantled for the most part by the Florentine Republic, huddle little houses; in the doorways boys and girls, mum as mice when the mailman goes by or a stranger on horseback; then exploding in a shout and a dust cloud and a ring-around-the-rosy showing you their heels and their tongues, both bare and bruised, with the most winning grace in the world.

The most civilized people in the world, those Tuscans; with a breeding ingrained and secular, no mere veneer of rote. In a motto, a maxim, a rhyme, a nickname, a remark, you know them for what they are. In that tiny drop of popular sense you feel an experience filtered down through the ages. They have mind-reading manners. The peasant, save in rare cases, shows a depth and humanity uncommon and lofty; and familiarity with him breeds neither contempt nor fatigue, as so often with other races, literate and dull, pastmasters in the science of creature comfort, but gross and unfeeling.

On the bounds of an estate, amid the ashen olives, the cypresses stand sentinel, a-twitter with

the tweet of sparrows at sunrise and sundown; and those cypresses, sir, as they crown a hilltop, or climb a slope, or hedge a lane, seem set there with art and intention, like shades conversing, or scaling a mountain, or guarding a ground, or advancing to welcome you, one by one, when the road, where they grow, leads to a villa.

Nicolo set off on his travels with no thought of all these brave things. His mind was busy with the great nobody he was sent to cope with. As he jogged along, he was cataloguing arguments, filing one for opposition, another for temporising. When he had rehearsed his small stock of conventional compliments, he would turn little Latin and Italian phrases in the recesses of his erudite mind. Compliments annoyed him: his mind never ran that way. He paid his tribute to the popular usage by some introductory generality or sententious maxim; but it was his way to go straight to the point, without preliminary flourish. His talk was all matter, all point, without varnish or ornament.

Earth and sky meant little to him, and even less traveller's luck. He could not stay for such

things, for he was always sent out hot-foot. He was the poor servant of a long-winded, irresolute popular government, which dispatched him incontinently, with pockets empty and a long hard road ahead. For our Signori were slow to decide; and time then grew very short and pressing. Nicolo would be sent for and instructed to speed *quam celerrime* hither and thither, over Appenine, over Alp, in fair weather or foul. . . .

In another matter too his democratic masters were his despair; and that was in keeping him democratically insolvent; so that at every fresh start he had to dun them for money. And that very cavalierly Signoria often let a year go by before it reimbursed him.

His restless and stirring nature and his devouring ambition to meet new people and to see with his own eyes the political motors of his age made Nicolo more willing than the other secretaries of the Chancery to embark on foreign missions: to the great despair of Marietta, who made a new vow to the Virgin, every time he bade her pack: for she just knew he would meet with robbers, or freebooters, or infidel Turks, or catch his death of

cold for lack of his flannels; but what could she do? Well, she could sew a scapular anyway in the lining of his sleeve, and that she did.

But Nicolo, lean as he was, had a sound constitution and a power of resistance peculiar to men inspired. People gape and wonder by the aid of what power those bag o' bones often outstay the strongest. Nicolo pushed dead ahead, over mountains, over plains, changing one horse for the next, and straight on to the Signori, to discuss and harangue, travel-worn as he was, without even waiting to wash his hands. Sometimes he would complain of being hoarse with fever or painfully busy about the bladder. But those were the least of his pains.

Earth and sky and their mutations interested him little; but men and their common lives, much. So he was careful to note, wherever he went, the laws of organized living, the rules of warfare, the treaties and agreements between States, and the men chosen to govern. Laws and constitutions, and political anecdotes and the number of soldiers he saw in a country, and how a stronghold could be taken or defended, he wrote down or noted in mind.

He drew up reports, of which he kept copies; sent messages home to the Chancery; and often used code to indicate important facts or names; or filed his letters in a messenger's clothes or his loaf of bread. Baccino, Ardingo, Zerino, Filippo, Mancino, he knew them all by name, the couriers of the Florentine Republic, who were always about the Appenines; and when he could not employ them, he turned to the Florentine merchants, who swarmed on all sides, with cloth to sell and spices to buy in stronds remote.

There were no newspapers then; but there were reporters. In every market, on every road, in every assembly, there were touring tongues, and thanks to these volunteers, facts sped with the utmost rapidity from one end of Italy to the other, and indeed throughout the Christian world. Friars, merchants and adventurers were talebearers who, when they reached a city, roused the hopes or fears of an entire population, sometimes occasioning outbreaks and revolts.

Nicolo was much prized for his letters by his friends and masters: his precise and ironical comments had won him a public. He was, they well

knew, quick to hear and slow to believe. The moment his missives reached the Chancery, they were read aloud to a small audience, amid a running comment of exclamations, laughter, and interminable discussions.

Thus Nicolo jogged on his way. He crossed mountains, valleys, and frontiers. The *Signori* kept him broke. He arrived in a place penniless and left it in debt. His masters sent him to retrieve lost causes. He alighted defeated and was expected to mount triumphant. He was a confidential drudge, whom they employed as an observer, a mediator, an ambassador, a commissioner, a proxy, an expert. Whether he failed or prevailed, his rank and pay remained the same.

Poor, abused and put upon, he was nonetheless happy to return to his desk after so many labors and ordeals, and happy, too, to set out again and discover new nations and political powers.

He served his country faithfully, and took orders from men who were his inferiors. Well he knew it, but he never complained, for he was serving the Lily and the Lion and not them. By

nature he was close and unemotional. But when his nag brought him to the top of San Donato or the Uccelatoio, and beneath him he saw the Arno shinning like a drawn sword and the Tower of the Signori straight as a flagstaff in the sky, then a great emotion surged up in him, at the sight of that city so loved and so loathed.

He undertook twenty-three missions abroad and many trips in the territory of the Republic. He was sent four times to the French King, a miserly and fearful protector and ally of the Florentines; twice to the Emperor Maximilian, a political dilletante, who ruined a kingdom with one hand while he picked up a Duchy with the other; twice to the Court of Rome, where nothing astonished him, having learned long ago from Suetonius that there had been Cæsars far worse than any mere Pope could hope to be; three times to Siena, to that double-dyed tyrant, Pandolfo Petrucci; three times to Piombino; once to the Signoria of Forlì, where he met Caterina Sforza, a thrice-married lady, who, shut up in a castle by rebels and threatened with the slaughter of her sons, gave her tormentors to understand, with energetic gestures, that she was

quite capable of making good the loss; to Giovan Paolo Baglioni, tyrant of Perugia, coward and fool, who might have rid himself and the world of the Pope and his Cardinals, when they walked into his hands to depose him; more than once to the camp against Pisa, where he saw that abominable mercenary rabble which, on the pretext of pay withheld, had seized the Florentine commissioner, Luca degli Albizzi; twice to Pisa itself, after its conquest, to prevent three cardinals from holding an anti-Papal conclave and to build a fortress to cow them; and hither and thither, to Mugello and Casentino, to raise troops for the national militia. Nations he knew too: the miserly French, the liberty-loving Swiss, and the hard and rude-mannered Germans.

He never set foot, though, in Southern Italy, knowing and caring less about Naples and Sicily than France and Germany; and he never crossed the sea. Venice he visited late in life. Dante also ignored Southern Italy. It was a distant, different, incomprehensible kingdom, and held no interest for other Italians.

He dealt with adventurers, with ministers, with

ambassadors, with prelates, with *condottieri,* with admirals, with legates and laymen, with friars, with captains, with peasants and merchants, with couriers, with scholars, with *beaux esprits,* with ladies, with wenches, with artists.

But of all his acquaintances the most important was that of Cæsar Borgia, Duca di Valentino, known as il Valentino.

IV

THE BASILISK

CÆSAR BORGIA and Nicolo Machiavelli! Between those two generators of political voltage, you would swear, sparks must fly! The most Machiavellic of sovereigns and the modest inventor of Machiavellism met for the first time at Imola in 1502. No explosion resulted. They were in contact for three months. The sky was not darkened. No deluge drenched Italy. The smiling Italian sky remained serene. Between Nicolo and Cæsar there was a wary non-conductor—imagination. In Nicolo, Cæsar saw the mouthpiece of the Florentine Republic. In Cæsar, Nicolo saw the living image of the Prince. One was misled by his political realism, the other by his political idealism. Cæsar was dealing not with Machiavelli, the philosophical historian, but with Machiavelli, the Florentine envoy; and Nicolo was dealing with the heir, by popular acclaim, to a noble destiny, with that

Borgia whom legend enveloped and transformed into a dragon, a basilisk, an Anti-Christ.

Cæsar, popularly known as Duke Valentino, was then by God's grace Duke of Romagna, Valenza and Urbino, Prince of Andria and Venafro, Tyrant of Piombino, Gonfaloniere and Commander-in-chief of the armies of Holy Mother Church. The doubly bastard son of Pope Alexander VI had renounced holy orders and his rank as a Cardinal to pursue a more promising career in politics. He had killed his brother. He had speeded the death of a brother-in-law who, however wracked, persisted in living. He had made a bid for fame by his over-lively love for his sister, Lucrezia, a lady for whom the Holy Father seemed also to entertain an over-weening affection.

This exemplary family was an object of fear and loathing to the timorous Florentine flock. Partly from pious horror, the legacy of Savonarola, partly from annoyance at the sound of a neighbor so powerful, perilous, and unscrupulous, buzzing in their backyard, the Florentines could not suffer the Duke. Lest they do him too much honor, therefore, when he asked for an honest-to-God ambassa-

dor, they sent him Nicolo. For all their illwill, however, Florentines and the Duke both lodged at the same sign, the Lily of France; and the friends of mutual friends must be friends. The more so, since one of Valentino's rebellious captains was a sworn foe of Florence, brother to that Vitelli, whom they had executed for treason in the Pisan war. The foes of our friends being our foes, Nicolo was sent to sound the ground and assure the Duke of the neutrality and benevolent sentiments of the Florentines.

The Duke and the underling were shrewd men both, but neither recognized the other for what he was. The Duke was Ducal, the functionary perfunctory. Each kept his place. Each tried to divine and hoodwink the other. Each knew that the other was trying to cheat him, but each was prying and nosing for the dram of truth the other was mixing with an ounce of false to make it convincing. So the fig-seller lays out on top his biggest, best and most succulent figs, leaving under the leaves of his ken the small, bruised and wizened ones to lure the client to buy; and the practised hand warily

CAESAR BORGIA

Attributed to Giorgione (Carrara Gallery, Bergamo)

picks out from on top, one by one, the ripe ones.

Nicolo looked on the legendary Duke and kept his head. Whatever opinion he pronounced on Valentino, he never touched on his private affairs.

Infantile, we say of the critic who judges a statesman by his private life, and unweaned, if he weighs political merits with his adulteries or violences; so Nicolo cared not a rap for Borgia's sins and kept his eye on the sights, which were his political aims and manœuvers.

Machiavelli lets no sign of disapproval transpire in the letters he writes home from Cæsar's court. He excelled in surrounding a political fact or figure with what I should call "a moral void." The actions he describes in his letters succeed one another in an absolute moral silence, and we can observe their effects undisturbed by any echo. They are like a game of billiards played in a closed room. The balls roll to and fro, shock and glance, jostle and click, and move to a standstill or a pocket. Every thrust has its aim, every stroke its counter-stroke, and every point its value. Machiavelli is the score-keeper. He knows every player, observes every

move, notes each point on his card, and marks hit and miss. His face shows no feeling, and his lips part but to name the winner.

Cæsar, known as il Valentino, was the ideal of the D'Annunziani of a decade or two ago, a recreant son of the Church, blond, beautiful, cruel, ambitious, valiant and fortunate, brawny of body as a bull-fighter, weariless in love as a cock, and a patron of artists as illustrious as Pinturicchio and Leonardo da Vinci.

To play his game of political billiards he had slipped off his cassock. The Pope, his father, had relieved him of his ecclesiastical bonds to put him into politics, as he had relieved Lucrezia of her marital ones to allow her to contract a more advantageous union. Some of his vainglorious mottoes and enterprises—such as his *aut Cæsar aut nihil*—show clearly whither and at what cost his lust for power was tending.

Valentino was not merely ambitious. He was a man who was aware of his times: he was a portent and instrument of his age. His great and short-lived career rose and vanished like a thunderstorm, coming at the end of spring at the ripe moment to

break an oppressive heat and announce the advent of summer.

The times were tending toward large national units. Modern States on a large scale, organized justice, regular taxes, public budgets and treasuries separate from those of the ruler, internal peace, suppression of brigandage. The age was sweeping away the little tyrants, the little republics, the little free states, the courts of the footling little lords of the sixteenth century. It was evolving man-sized tyrants, big armies, wholesale despotism, wholesale justice or injustice, as the case might be. Everywhere the so-called communal liberties were on the decline because they were group or-clique-privileges, to be replaced by a universal subjection, which had at least one advantage, that of material prosperity for the majority. The absolute liberty of a few was bartered for the half-liberty of many.

When Valentino described to Machiavelli his plan of "crushing the tyrants," he was the man of modern times and the liberator of the people as opposed to the Petrucci and the Vitelli, the Badiglioni and the Gravinas, the Manfredi, the Sforzas,

and the de Varanos. At bottom, they were no worse and no better than he. Moreover, they stood for a reactionary and stagnant state of society. Valentino represented personality and progress; they were conservatism and nullity.

Machiavelli is deeply impressed by his personal power. He writes home: "*He is a right splendid and magnificent Prince, in arms so enterprising, that there is no great deed but seems small to him; and in glory or the gain of a State he resteth never nor knows peril nor weariness; he comes betimes to a place, when no man knows yet what enterprise he leaves; of his soldiery he is loved, and of the best and most picked men of Italy; these things make him triumphant and redoubtable, combined with an unending good fortune.*"

When Machiavelli met him he was conducting his campaign of the winter of 1499, on his way from Rome to Bologna—Florence he was leaving aside for another day. He had routed the last Sforzas, Malatestas, Manfreds and Montefeltros. His power extended from Cagli and Camerino to Ceri, Sutri, Orvieto, and Piombino, from Imola to Fano, from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhene Sea, form-

ing a sort of Central-Italian State, which might one day become the center of attraction for all the rest of Italy north of the Kingdom of Naples, where now so many little free states and principalities worked for weakness and disunion.

Machiavelli seemed to see the man of his dreams. A general, a strategist, an administrator: to-day we should call him a little Napoleon. As soon as he took a town, he organized it, refortified it, and left one of his trusted captains to govern it, for all the world as if he considered it his for keeps.

No sooner were the cities of Romagna won, than he realized that the problem of water is paramount in that region and called in the first hydraulicist of his time, Leonardo da Vinci, but he made him also repair fortresses and put up noble buildings. He knew that men must be struck in two vital spots, below the belt and between the eyes, in their purse and in their imagination. He instituted tribunals, pawn-shops, and charitable organizations. One of his governors abused his powers: the next day he was lying in the gutter, in half. Valentino was sharp, swift and bold, close of counsel, and always

active in war and diplomacy; in making a treaty he always left a loophole by which to slip out of it. He dispatched as many envoys in one day as the niggardly Florentines in two years. He had as many pieces of artillery as all the other princelings of Italy put together. His armies were always well fed. He would receive anyone he chose at night; and the others knew enough to keep out of sight and out of earshot. His intentions escaped the sharpest eyes; even Machiavelli was unable to guess them. And, lastly, he was beginning to levy the natives of his territories and to build up what looked like a national army.

Here was more than enough to inflame Machiavelli's imagination, for Machiavelli, like all men who desire a thing passionately, was prone to see the saviour of Italy on every side. The unity of Italy! Some such idea may well have flashed through Valentino's mind. There is no evidence to the contrary. As the Pope's favorite son, superior in political art to all other Italian princes, superior too in ambition, and of all the least scrupulous, the idea of a Kingdom of Italy may well have occurred to him. He was a "Fortune's darling," and

Machiavelli felt a peculiar respect for that Goddess, inferior only to that which he held for the Goddess of Will; and even in will Valentino was not lacking. He was an up-to-date bandit, on whom you could count for some really illustrious infamy to make him immortal in the minds of men; better than all the little sneak-thieves he knew.

His first superficial acquaintance with Valentino Machiavelli made in June, 1502; and thereafter he saw him daily, following him step by step in one of his most famous exploits—the massacre of Oliverotto da Fermo, Paolo Orsini, Vitellozzo Vitelli, and the Duke of Gravina, which occupied him from October, 1502, to January, 1503. The victims were four captains who had rebelled at a time when the breath of Fortune seemed less favorable to Valentino than usual. Meeting at La Magione near Perugia, they had exchanged faith to betray the Borgia. The Borgia had taken the blow, as was his wont, imperturbably. He had laughed at their league. He had come to terms with them. He had proposed an understanding, which he was protracting to keep them inactive; and meanwhile he was mustering his armies. His words

bespoke amity; his actions, preparation. Without threatening, never raising his voice or showing his hand, conciliating and artful, he had persuaded the four to invite him to a meeting at Senigaglia, which they vacated as he marched in with his troops. And there, entering his palace and greeting them solicitously, he nabbed them, throttled one pair in his Spanish way without so much as a *manana* and held the other over until his father, the Pope, could secure their kinsman and protector, Cardinal Orsini, and dispose of him as well.

This "most sweet ruse" startled Machiavelli himself. He had been seeing the Duke every day, or his minister, Agapito Gherardini da Amelia, or one or another of his minions and intimates. He knew that the Duke was up to something, but such a masterstroke he really had not forseen. He dilated upon it at some length in his letters to the *Signoria*, most of which are lost, and in a celebrated *Narration*.

All the public opinion of the time was roused by this exploit. The news flew from town to town, on the lips of travellers, monks and soldiers, exciting the most diverse comments and inflaming the

imagination of men, wherever it went, in inns, in churches, in public places and private homes. Crowds would gather about the bearers of the tale, and the figure of the Duke assumed ever more menacing proportions in the minds of men. Already cities and princes saw him at their gates, beautiful, lowering, insolent, laden with sins, burning to revenge or corrupt, and quailing at nothing to reach the goal of his ambition. The news took two days to reach the Pope; and when it ran through Rome, there was a mad scramble away from Sant' Angelo.

Epigrams, street-songs, and ribald slurs pursued the Pope and his son. In Florence the Savonarolian rancors were as lively as ever; and Machiavelli was not uncensured for his unbiased reports on the Duke and his doings.

We all know what excitement and overwrought feeling a political crime can awake in the best of us. We must each have our say, we must all bring our clue, and the air is tense with passion and prejudice. The most loyal are swept away in the tide of lies. The air is so vibrant with excitement, that no line can be drawn true. We swear to the

most contradictory things and often in perfect good faith.

All honor, therefore, to Machiavelli for keeping his head on this occasion. He continued imperturbably to paint, with loving strokes, his "promoter of energy," Valentino, as a political motor perfectly contrived for its own functions. In bracing himself against the current, however, he became so set, that later he gave the traits of a Valentino to every historical figure he treated: whether Theodoric or Castruccio.

A little later Valentino fails, his realm becomes a Roman fief, his enemy Julius II triumphs, his fastnesses fall, and he himself is captured and shipped back to Spain as a dangerous alien. There he tries to start over and falls in an assault. Machiavelli is in Rome, and he observes from afar his hero's lingering deflation. But his judgment remains unchanged. The man may have failed, but the method was the right one. He failed by a slip, a freak of Fortune, which betrayed her favorite, keeping him on a sick-bed during the very days, when his father fell ill and died in Rome. Roman malaria can be Providential on occasion.

Later he would say, as he chatted in the pharmacy of l'Impruneta: "If I were a new prince, I should do so and so—like the Duke Valentino."

Or, over a game of bowls: "Now, my friend," he would sigh, "you shall run for it. You shall run as Petrucci ran from Valentino!" To the weary retort of: "Valentino? What Valentino? Watch your play, partner!"

V

SODERINI

IN 1502, on the twentieth of September, Pier Soderini, son of Tommaso, of noble family and democratic ideas, was elected for life Gonfaloniere of the Commune of Florence. Machiavelli had been in office four years.

Plant a slip of noble stock in popular soil, and nine times out of ten he will bring to public practise a subtlety, a skill, a tolerance and humanity which, save in rare cases, it would be idle to look for in a genuine son of the people, risen from nothing to the Palazzo della Signoria. His culture, his social discipline, the use and responsibility of land and property, the background of breeding in his family, mould the angles long-since acquainted with every contrariety, and allow that man to master his instincts of party or class, to subdue the frailties of congenital egoism, and to become a true kernel of common weal.

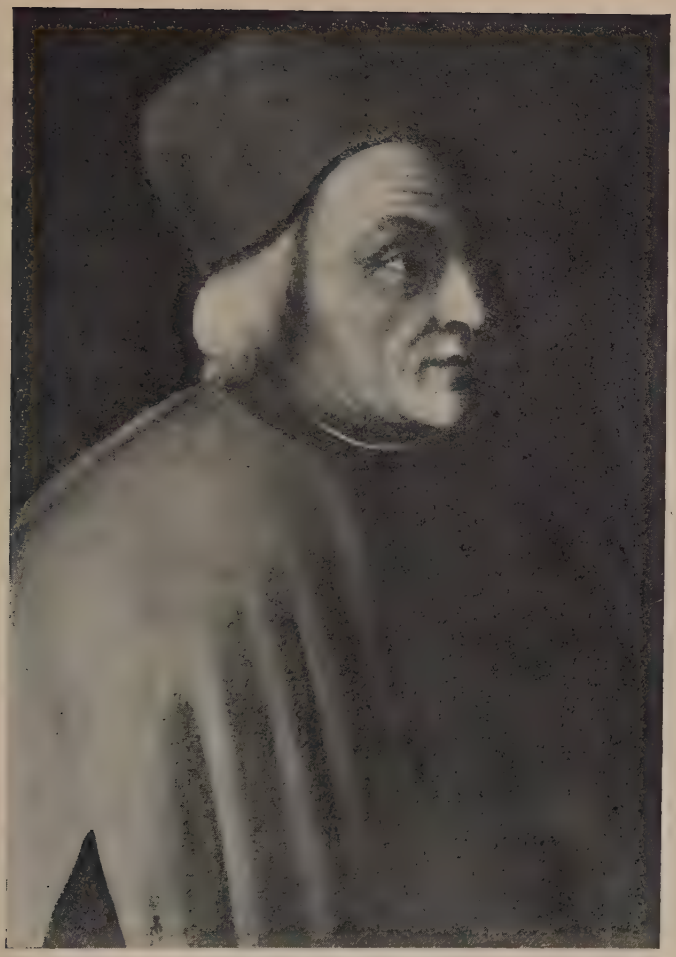
The Catholic Church attains the same results, by different means: by a lengthy process of selection and training, full of mellowing ordeals, obstacles, vigils, and patient filtrations, in the course of which the man of the people, taken at an early age from his family, and many times sifted and winnowed, is subjected to the scrutiny and appraisal, both immediate and prospective, of innumerable judges, who are generally, if not friendly, acute and far-sighted. The Catholic Church is the only existing democratic institution.

Pier Soderini owed his election to his inoffensiveness. His age was mature, his wealth not inordinate. His reputation for integrity and moderation had brought him popularity. He was agreeable, above all, to those Florentines who were childless and could not hope to found a dynasty. His election was a credit to Florence: it might have taken place in England. He was out of town, when the Council assembled; no money changed hands; no shooting was heard in the streets; no soldiers were seen at the polls. Neither the *Piagnoni* nor the *Arrabiati* voted for him: he was chosen by the Center, the average, the moderate majority, in ob-

vious liking for his honest liberal principles.

Machiavelli was a friend of the family; and on learning of his election, he wrote to congratulate him. What he actually felt, however, it is hard to say: both respect, no doubt, and contempt. Unquestionably he had a higher opinion of his brother Francesco, Bishop and later Cardinal of Volterra, who had one day faced a popular uprising with courage and authority and saved his skin, his kin, and his robe.

Soderini governed legally, justly, humanely. Machiavelli prized liberty and appreciated immensely that mannerly cult of law. But there was one drawback: such principles, were good, he felt, for times of peace and plenty: when food was short and life a draw, another temper was needed. In times like those Machiavelli wanted a man who knew his own mind and who was prompt, like himself, to act swiftly and boldly. Soderini, alas, honored humanity, proceeded patiently, and never lost his faith in men and time. When his power was threatened, he raided twenty-five of his enemies but took no lives. His was a law-abiding nature, formal and feeble. When he acted energetically, it



PIERO SODERINI

By an unknown painter (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

was always an hour too late. He was a good man, when he should have been a strong one. In a conflagration he flew to rose-water. One of his favorite hand-rubbing phrases had won him the nickname with the populace of *Trust-me-my-friend.*

This fair-weather skipper was blown from the helm by a storm which would have worsted the strongest. Tuscany was threatened by an army of Spaniards, returning from the battle of Ravenna (1512), who demanded the deposition of Soderini and the restoration of the Medici. To their threats Soderini replied that only the Council which had elected could depose him, and convened it. Votes in his favor, pikes at his back.

The Spaniards poured into Tuscany, attacked, took and sacked Prato. Prato is one day's march from Florence. Two days after its fall, (August 28, 1512) the news of which struck terror into a Florence full of women and traders, three intrepid young bucks, Paolo Vettori, Anton Francesco degli Albizzi and Bartolomeo Valori, known for their disorders and extravagances, the kind of boys who are always hanging around bars, brothels and gaming-tables, broke into the Palace, seized Sode-

rini and made his deposition the price of his life.

The Council preferred to depose him, and accordingly he was persuaded to retire to private life. That night he left town by the Porta Romana, escorted by Musacchino, a loyal Albanian in the service of Florence, and forty soldiers. He carried a safe-conduct through the Papal States and a message for the Pope, which his brother had given him, with the warning, however, not to trust to it. Halfway to Rome, therefore, he decided on a pilgrimage to Loreto and fled Italy, crossing to Ragusa, first, and then to Castenuovo dei Turchi—Castelnuovo of the Turks, as it then was.

Nor did he die without slipping back to Rome and conspiring there against the Medici.

Machiavelli gave him second burial in a well known epigram:

> Pier Soderini, he passed away
> And went to Hell, boo-hoo!
> Hell, fool? cries Pluto. Nay, nay!
> The limbo of babies for you.

VI

THE BREACH OF PRATO

SODERINI'S patronage allowed Nicolo to test his scheme for a national militia. The scheme, in brief, was to levy one able-bodied male from every family in the loyal parts of the country, to hand him a pike, a staff, a corporal and a captain, to call him to drill on Sundays and holidays and summon him twice a year for manœuvers in Florence; and then, when he was properly sworn in and turned out, to make him fight for the Republic. It was a Swiss idea, still practised in that State, or a foretaste, if you prefer, of the National Guard, or a republican conscription or citizen's army some hundred years or so before its time. Like all premature fruit, it was gaseous.

At the test (literally) of fire, the militia took to its heels. Its heels were all that the enemy saw of it. And not having far to run, it was run down; but that, after all, is beside the point.

Machiavelli had promoted two bills, which provided for the creation of a national militia, and for some time, in 1505, he led the life of a recruiting sergeant, going to Borgo San Lorenzo, in the Casentino, to Bagno di Romagna, and other little boroughs, for the incumbent operations; and there running to and fro, in those mountains, coping with the obstinacy of peasants ill used to obeying, totally deficient in patriotic sentiment or military efficiency, and wrangling among themselves in unending regional feuds.

Such a militia could hardly offer a fair test.

For a national army, you must first have a nation: the soldier, that is, must be a citizen and feel himself a member of his country. But Florence was a nation of Florentines; it was not the land of the Aretine, the Pisan, the Volterrano, the Pesciatino, the Poggibonsese, the Casentinese, nor even of all Florentines. The cities were serfs and rebelled on the first occasion. The campaigns were barbarous, and the troops obeyed through fear, not love.

The hired militias fought for money and spoils: those of Machiavelli's imagining would have had

to fight for their hides. It was an aery notion, worse than the evil it was meant to combat.

Moreover that militia, unwillingly voluntary and inadvertently national, had no leader. Though a leader there might have been. A leader there undoubtedly was in in one Antonio Giacomini, a popular, responsible, bold and single-minded proletarian, who had defeated Bartolomeo d'Alvano in the war against Pisa. But democracies are notoriously coy and jealous. They dread upstarts. They are like those millionaires' daughters who, fearful of being sought for their money, live out their embittered old age in a convent or a mansion full of heirlooms. They are never outwitted, but they have no children; no one deceives them, but they never know love. So the Republic never gave command to a Florentine, and, on Machiavelli's recommendation, it entrusted the first Italian national militia to a ruffian, Don Michelotto, late bruiser and bully to Valentino, and a Spaniard to boot.

The national militia was an unseasonable fruit, and it was put on the market by an alien.

When, in 1512, the Spaniards, hot from the ruin

of Ravenna, were nearing Prato, where Soderini had placed some four thousand militiamen, Fortune was wavering and needed only a jolt. The Spaniards were not numerous. They were weary, they were famished. They were not furious. They might readily have agreed, some say, for a small consideration, such as a barrel of wine, a loaf of bread and a parting kick, to keep moving toward Monte Morello and points southward. The road to Rome was tawny with grapes, in those last days of August, and grapes in summer are palatable, if a bit tart.

But the food was not forthcoming and the Spaniards had to fetch it in Prato. The city was defended by a wall and the wall by a militia. Two Spanish cannon were working, and one made a breach in the wall. The breach was no bigger than a window or a hole. The hole was no wider than a barn-door, and four men could climb through it, short of a Sancho Panza. Once through the breach there were streets and houses full of troops, with crossbows, pikes and blunderbusses. The militia had only to move a hand, nay, a finger, to make a slaughter, a clean sweep, of Spaniards.

Instead, it turned tail through the streets of Prato. It showed a nimble acquaintance with many forms of gymnastic exercise. It was stopped only by the brick and mortar of the town-gates it had walled up the better to defend them. In the inverse and, alas, unforseen contingency of being unable to escape by them, it was slaughtered. Soldiers, civilians, old men, children, fell in the onslaught of Spaniards, who exercised every privilege in the charter of conquest to pillage, slaughter and rape. The women fled in a body to the convents, but the subjects of the Most Catholic King made no distinction between the brides of the Pratesi and those of the Lamb. The Madonna of the Duomo lost her crown, and to protect her the Infant Jesus had to lay his hand on her head, a posture in which the pacific tourist still admires him to-day.

The sack of Prato is one of the most atrocious and disgraceful chapters in the history of Italy. The tidal wave of terror which followed it was surpassed only several years later by the sack of Rome. Even Michelangelo, who was careful to keep clear of politics, was stung by it.

Prato is about twenty-three miles from Florence. To-day it is reached in half an hour by train; a good cyclist, allowing for the crowded and hilly road, would make it in two hours. In those days news travelled on foot, and the tidings took a night to reach Florence and a day more to reach Poggibonsi. At the first whisper of disaster the unsteady government of Soderini collapsed. Back came the Medici, and with them all the reckonings and revenges, banishments and transformations, and familiar mutations and embers of a municipal revolution. When the dust had cleared, Machiavelli had lost his job. He began to write.

A cannon fired, a breach made, a militia in flight—to such accidents we owe the legacy of his thoughts by the greatest political thinker the world has known since Aristotle.

The breach of Prato failed to shake the sounder foundations of Machiavelli's convictions. He continued to support and advocate the abolition of mercenary militias. In defense of a national one he wrote his *Art of War,* which had a steady sale with the book-loving public of his day. Not only were military tactics intimately associated in his

GIOVANNI DI PIER FRANCESCO DE'MEDICI
KNOWN AS GIOVANNI DELLE BANDE NERE
By Bronzino (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

mind with the art of politics, but by his experience in the Pisan war, the recruiting of militias, the study of the fortification of Florence, and the expert observation of so many armies and captains in many and many a land, he had amassed a fund of military science and aspired himself some day to assume a command. Of that lurking ambition there is proof in the little anecdote which one of his contemporaries has left us, and which is worth recounting once again.

Nicolo Machiavelli was visiting Giovanni delle Bande Nere, and, as his wont was, being full of his favorite topics, the militias, the Romans, their marching orders and formations, and how much was to be learned from them, Giovanni proposes a practical demonstration with three thousand men, whom he places at his disposal. Nicolo consents. He drills and drills, marches and countermarches, and keeps his host and his guests sweltering two hours in the sun, and all to no avail. But his explanations were so clear and so sound, and, as he described it, the formation seemed so absurdly simple, that any one but those soldiers

could see it was bound to come out right sooner or later. However, midday was approaching. Nicolo, with all history hooting in his ear, struggled furiously, like a bird in snare. But the more he shouted and stamped, the more he sprained his wing and muddled his men.

At last Giovanni delle Bande Nere, heeding the still small voice which bade him break his fast, offered to relieve Messer Nicolo. Courteously inviting him to retire, he took command, and to the roll of drums, put all those marching feet through their wonted and manifold paces, to the great admiration of all present.

Then they sat down to meat, and Machiavelli came to with one of his best bawdy stories: in which there were no Romans to emulate and none to outdo him.

Part Three

POST RES PERDITAS

1

BALLS AND BOUNCINGS

IN the Italy of which we are treating a change in policy meant a change in the payroll: a government of the Reds meant jobs for the Reds, and a government of the Blacks jobs for the Blacks. Promote the Panciatichi, and every last employee went Panciatichi, down to the donzel bell-boy; came the Cancellieri, and *presto*, Florence, clean to the toll-gate, Cancellieri. Requiem in the Vatican for a Lombard, and not a *Nay* for a *No* within ear-shot; salvos for his Venetian successor, and Saint Peter patters the soft slurring drone of his dialect.

The same law held good in the Palazzo in Florence. At every change of masters, the full bellies scuttled off to make room for the lean.

So, when the whistle blew, every man made shift to swear undying devotion to the newcomer. Came the Medici, and all who could count on credulity

for credentials crossed their hearts immutably Medici; and the stonecutters of Settignano and Maiano, unbidden by town-crier or Mayoral behest, hewed blazons of balls, to stucco the house-fronts and vouch for the loyalty of the householder. Balls blossomed on sleeves, on coats, on caps; cripples ordered a pair for their crutches, coachmen for the harness of their horses, the gentry for their liveries and loggias, and dandies for their cigarette-holders. A gentlewoman made a sensation, going to Mass in a mantle embroidered with balls, and next day all the milliners in town were overwhelmed with *match-me-that-if-you-please-ma'ams*. The cake called *schiacciata*, sold in the shops about the Ponte Vecchio, became *ball-cake* by grace of a few little frosted globules. Three golden balls twinkled over the head of Christ Crucified, and there were those among the faithful who murmured at what they considered sacrilege.

Machiavelli alone fancied he could still hold his three-legged secretarial stool, after the fall of Soderini and the popular government. He had done his duty, his whole duty, by his master; whether

he kissed him goodbye at the Porta Romana I know not, but I do know that he helped him to the house of Francesco Vettori, thus saving his life. And for some time thereafter he maintained a half open, half-veiled correspondence with him, proof at least that Soderini had no boot-speed for send-off.

But, the last *vale* bestowed on that demi-demise, Machiavelli bestirred himself to honor the quick and secure his living, or, failing that, to bestow himself as he might with the Medici, in Florence or Rome. If he failed for himself, he hoped at least to place his brother.

Yes, I know. "The soul of a flunkey," you will say. "He has hardly done shining the shins of one master, when he comes around begging alms of his murderer, and in the very house where he served him! Ring-around-the-rosy, my new master, though a tyrant you be, I've my nest to keep warm, if you don't mind, and democrat though I am, I don't relish the night air outside the roost."

Granted. Well and what of it? Men will be men, and Machiavelli was a man like another. It may be, it may very well be, that his needs, the thought

of his family, the habitual freedom of his expenditures, made him over-compliant with the Medici; but he offers his experience, his advice, his devotion, with the thought ever uppermost in his mind of a flourishing Florence, a unified Italy, a national army. To a dictator those things, he thinks, are quite as important as to a republic. He loves Florence as he always did and asks but to serve it. He can not talk shop, quote trade, or keep accounts: he does not sleep with the monthly balance sheet under his pillow. He has one thought, one passion, one ideal and one only: political life, the life of the State. To that ideal he dedicates himself wholly, and little he cares who his chief may be, for the moment.

And with that love he has also a loathing. He prefers democracy to despotism, but he has no patience with populars, when they lack backbone, courage and decision. He has lived with the Republic and the marriage has not been happy. He is through with Soderini. He has done his duty, faithfully, by one master. Now for another. He waits, he hopes. Maybe, after all, maybe there will come a Medici who will know, who will dare,

who will raise the banner and unite the forces of Italy against the foreigner. To that Medici he says —Take me.

And, of course, the Medici reject him.

With dogged, lowly, trusting tenacity Machiavelli offers himself; advises; proposes. He cleaves to Francesco Vettori, the Florentine Ambassador to the Court of Rome, favored of the Medici; writes to Madonna Alfonsina, Lorenzo's scheming mother; proffers an opinion on the Constitution of Florence and dissuades the Cardinal Giovanni from claiming the restoration of his confiscated property. Vettori plays the protector, and does nothing; Alfonsina lets him talk, and advises her dear son against him; the Cardinal reads and does just the opposite of what Machiavelli advises.

After the feeble democrat Machiavelli was to know the mediocre tyrant, the little reactionary incapable of recognising or understanding a man of genius, the princeling who prefers obedient rascals to the spirited service of a gentleman. In Florence Machiavelli's position goes to a certain Micheluzzi, of questionable origin, a willing tool in the hands of the Medici; in Rome Giuliano takes

as his secretary one Pietro Ardinghelli, who sells his master's favor for moneys. Such were the men the Medici preferred to a Machiavelli.

"Machiavelli is not your man," says Alfonsina; "Machiavelli is not your man," chimes the Cardinal, "Machiavelli is not our man," conclude Giuliano and Lorenzo in chorus.

And poor Machiavelli continues to court, wheedle and praise these dull descendants of the adroit Lorenzo; to hope, to dream, to build in imagination his Italy, Romanly great and feared throughout the world. For him the antique strain was not bred out; at any moment it might rise, as Petrarch had prophecied; and in every rise and snarl of men or events he seemed to see the emancipator of Italy afoot. One man, but one man who would, and Italy could be saved.

That was why, when he wrote his *Prince*, he thought of dedicating it to Giuliano and then decided on Lorenzo, whose fortune seemed more favorable and whose determination to succeed more dogged.

But Lorenzo, on the very day on which he received the manuscript of *The Prince* with its hum-

ble dedication: "*Accept, I pray, Magnificenza, this small gift in the spirit I send it; the which, in that spirit if it be diligently perused, you shall find here an extreme desire that your Worship attain to that eminence which Fortune and your Worship's other gifts do augur,*" on that same day Lorenzo had received as a gift from one of his minions a brace of hounds, male and female, by name Bamboccio and Rossina: such pets as his kennels had never known the peer of. And what with Bamboccio here and Rossina there, he whistled away the whole sweet day, playing with them, fondling them, making them leap and bark and pick up the scent, and returning himself three or four times to the kennels to see to their lodging and feeding. A beautiful letter was composed for the friend who had sent them, and only along toward evening, seeing that book still lying on the table, he sent a flunkey with two flasks of wine to Machiavelli to say, Sir, I thank you.

II

SIX STRIPES ON HIS BACK

AGOSTINO DI PIER CAPPONI and Pier Paolo Boscoli were two reputable young men, who had read too much Latin and listened too long to Savonarola. That had persuaded them that the era of Brutus and the age of the Apostles would return upon earth, if only the Medici could be expelled from Florence.

Convictions of that sort are called, in troubled times, conspiracies. A list of names lost by one of them and found by a spy in the house of the Lenci betrayed them. They were seized in their beds, on the 18th of February, 1513, imprisoned, tortured, forced to confess, and killed. And the record of their last hours, left by a truthful and ingenuous observer, constitutes one of the most graphic documents left by those times in witness of such singular blendings of Roman myth and Christian love.

But that is not why I recall them. They matter to me only because on that list figures, along with theirs, the name of Nicolo di Bernardo Machiavelli. He had never dreamed of conspiring. He disliked conspiracies and condemned them in his writings, both paid and unpaid. So little indeed was he minded to plot, that no sooner was Soderini out of sight, than he began to turn around the Medici.

But those two mettlesome lads had assumed that the loss of his position and one or two slighting words Nicolo had let fall would allow them to count on him, in the event of a plot; and had included his name among those of whom they hoped much. No more was needed. Machiavelli was seized before the day was out and imprisoned.

Now, Nicolo Machiavelli, like all men in their sound senses, was afraid of pain. Fear is a steadying factor in the world. Where would we be, if all men were bold, reckless, and unfeeling?

What little wisdom the world has it owes to men, who are reasonably afraid. Without fear there would be neither foresight nor saving, nor laws observed, nor shelter from cold and rain,

nor industries, nor professions, nor archives, nor banks. That rational apprehension keeps us from embarking on desperate enterprises and committing irretrievable blunders. Fear is a salutary check on humanity, and Nicolo had just so much of it as a man of sense needs.

But he was capable of facing the inevitable. Fear is laudable as long as it keeps us out of mischief and sorrow. But once they are on you, a man can only brace up and go through with them.

And that was just what Nicolo did. He went through with it; he faced torture without confessing, either because his courage rose under trial, or because he had nothing to confess. For more than a month he lay in a cell among rats as large as cats and lice as "plump as butterflies." One day he had a bad jolt when he heard the keys in the doors and the friars below mumbling prayers for the dying. Was the noose that near? Only Capponi and Boscoli paid with their lives. When he came out, however, he could show his wife the bruise of his fetters, for they had bound him by the feet like a falcon to its perch.

He did not suffer long.

Six coils of the lash sufficed. The ready confession of Boscoli and Capponi saved him from worse. And before some Medicean friend could intervene, he was freed by the election of Giovanni de' Medici to the Papacy under the name of Leo X.

In Florence joy gilded the Lily. He was the first Florentine Pope. Everyone discovered suddenly some remote tie of blood or friendship with the new Pontiff. One recalled how, the day he was walking and forgot his purse, he had lent him twenty-five lire; another, how he had supplied his nose with snuff; a third, how he had tickled him in the arms of his nurse and, for her mighty breasts, the Mugellese wench too, who had given him suck. One a mite more, one a mite less, but one and all dreamed of wealth or power or favor or fame or some little loft in the stables in Rome, where they were sure to be changing the help, as always was done at the death of a Pope.

Machiavelli thought he was dreaming, when he found himself once more on the pavements of Florence. And here, dear reader, I should like

to paint him, taper in hand, grave and relieved, on his way to give thanks to the Lord in some fair Florentine chapel.

But, a truthful historian, I am bound to report that for five or six days Nicolo went on a terrible bat in the flats of certain not altogether God-fearing young women, notably Sandra di Pippo, from whose window he could follow the whole great parade held in Florence in honor of the elevation to the Papacy of their esteemed fellow-citizen, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici. The wonted potwallopers were with him, Tommaso del Bene, Donato del Como, Girolamo del Guanto, Count Orlando, and others no less public-minded. They drained many flagons of wine, danced the dance of the Angels, made the ladies play monitor, and betook themselves to their beds at a small hour, to the acute distress of their respective spouses.

Those were the last days Machiavelli was permitted to spend in Florence. Shortly thereafter he had to withdraw to his villa at Sant' Andrea. Days of Spring limping and blowing, of blustering winds, of sudden hail-storms, of lingering sunbursts making the trees swim with sap, the mead-

ows hum and the birds sing, under the sweet sky of Florence.

Machiavelli made the most of them with his boon brigade, but soon, under his laughter and under his singing, his friends were aware of an agonized undertone, a smothered lament. His thoughts, no sooner routed, returned, more galling than ever. For a man of such mettle and honor could there be greater grief than to be cast off and denied, neglected for men who were worth less than he? He felt the full force of his misfortune, far from the only things which meant anything to him; his whole life severed; his sweat and toil spent in vain; without a country; looked upon with mistrust. Some time he had yet to check up his accounts and conclude his affairs; and every so often he had to return to the Palace, like a delinquent to the Tribunal, to draw up the papers which served to condemn him; and there he had to treat with the new occupants, whose brain-pans weighed as hollow as a canary's.

In spite of these affronts, he tried to delay his departure, because after all he preferred to live in a civilized land and hear tell of the Turk and

the King, the Swiss and the Emperor, than among the yokels of San Casciano, with whom all his discourse must be of the price of wine and the sale of wood. Every evening, sitting on a little bench with his friends the Capponi, he would watch the wane of the last rays of day, reasoning of one thing and another. He blamed no one. Fortune, that old baggage, who had brought him low and would yet, by God, lift him high, would have found him always dry-eyed.

III

MACHIAVELLI STUCK IN THE MUD

WHEN at last the end of that stay came and could no longer be prorogued, Nicolo set out for his exile, which he was to spend at the Albergaccio (the Dump), a villa of his in S. Andrea in Percussina. Nicolo was a small landowner. Hard by the villa he had a keep overlooking the road, the home of the keeper, Capitino. Dotting the adjoining landscape lay three domains: il Poggio, Fontalla or New Lands, and Monte Pugliano, an olive grove, some woods. In the popular quarter of S. Felicità in Florence he owned a house and a hovel, both habitable, and another pair of cots employed respectively as a pothouse and a butchery in S. Andrea in Percussina. These brought in a bare living, provided he ate little and found his pleasure in the good air and beautiful view the villa afforded.

To understand Machiavelli's position at this pe-

riod by a modern instance, imagine an employee of the League of Nations, coming from one of those small States, which are forced by their exiguity to follow the politics of Britain, when they are not required to abet those of France; a translator, say, or a secretary, or anything you please, provided you keep him subordinate; who by the nature of his duties is familiar with the secrets of those political transactions, which are made at table or in a lobby, and which are more binding than those concluded in official sessions; who has approached Briand at dinner, interpreted for Streseman, and travelled with Churchill; who has carried a message to Mussolini in Rome, improving the occasion to call *incognito* on Cardinal Gasparri; and who has been reading all this while diplomatic reports, secret documents, and political papers. Now, one fine day an unforseen change in the politics of his country removes this little employee from Geneva, where he has been living wrapt in the game of high politics, which he has had occasion to observe at close range and in its most secret manifestations for ten years or more; and sends him home to some village, where mail comes once a

week, where there is never a newspaper, where the curate is the one literate in the land and the store-keeper sells three bottles of ink a year.

That poor devil is the living image of Nicolo during his life at the villa.

What resources has he? From September on, for a month or two, a little thrush-hunting, with the help of an owl, in the brake and in the near-by woods the cages of blinded song-birds to care for; the supervision of an oak-copse to be felled and cut up into faggots and beams, which he sells to his friends, with never a penny to show for it; the re-reading of his Latin authors; the company of a miller, a butcher, and two furnace-makers; a widow who is sweet on him; an ambassador, Francesco Vettori, who recalls his old comrade of diplomatic missions and still deigns to write him from Rome to ask his highly-revered opinion on the doings of the day, assuring him that he never met a man of better judgment: and confides to him his dread of the Turks, while Nicolo avows his of the Switzers.

Thereupon Nicolo, unsolaced by the balm of these corner-store confabulations nor able to put

his finger into the pie, takes to meditating upon politics from afar; and as with a passion, from which we have not recovered but which daily is fading, if it recurs, we can make copy of it; so Machiavelli, removed but not yet recuperated from his political disasters, takes to writing on politics, but not of any specific politics calling for personal opinion or action; but on Politics in general, on abstract and eternal Politics, as practised by the ancients and still performed by the moderns. Our little employee writes treatises now —no longer reports: the clerk has become a philosopher.

The letter in which he has told us of the birth of *The Prince* is well-known, but it is too beautiful to resist the pleasure of re-reading it. And re-read it I must, every time I open that volume of letters and my finger feels its way to that page. "From the wood I betake me to a spring and thence to an aviary, which is mine own. . . ." That letter leads us into Machiavelli's privacy: we enter his house, we see him with his family, we feel his sorrow, and console ourselves with his greatness.

That wood and that spring and that aviary

"which is mine own" revive at the mere thought of Nicolo Machiavelli, for they cheered him with the balm of shade, water, and song. We hear him reading aloud his Tibullus and Ovid, Dante and Petrarch, and we cherish those poets the more; we watch him gossiping with the countrymen in the inn, listening to their troubles, smiling at their notions, noting their various conceits and reducing them all to his own chosen laws of life; and those Tuscans seem a more lovable people than ever.

Then at table with his children and his Marietta. A sudden slap, the chatter is hushed, but not for long. The maid, or Capitino, or some drayman goes by, looks in at the door, steps in and offers a moment's relief. Beans, cold meat, turnips, stale bread, apples and pears, Marzolino cheese and a little home-grown wine to quench the itch of the cheese: the meal is frugal.

By day Machiavelli repairs to the pot-house to play cards, tric-trac or backgammon with the host, the butcher, the miller and the furnace-makers; and the game goes to his head, he shouts, he swears and flounders in interminable diatribes over a point or a penny.

The sun sets and the other Machiavelli comes forth. He enters his study. It is the study of his rural affairs, the office of his little firm, where he counts pennies, not florins, as once for the Signori in Florence. On those little Tuscan farms, where the owner is a sort of overseer, the office is on the ground floor, open to all who come and go; and it often has a window, barred with iron, set high from the floor; and you hear the pawing or munching of a horse or an ox dee'd to the outer wall; in one corner of the room stands a sack of meal, awaiting the miller, or some rural implement in need of repair; and finally, in the center, the desk with its ink-well, its pens, its duster, its fox-paw, its piles of papers and all those mysterious implements which excite the mistrust of the countryman.

Outside the door Machiavelli leaves his everyday life and its smirchings and shortcomings; and here, in his study, every evening a new soul rises, which claims and pursues its own life. It bids him up and don once more his official robes and evoke the great men of antiquity. Fondly they welcome

him, heed him, answer him, resolve his doubts, confirm his convictions. And for four hours all other thoughts leave him: where are his debts now? his taxes due? his wood bills to collect? the nightmare of torture and death? the Court of Rome to be sued to and those rascally Medici, who turn him a deaf ear? Nought of all that now; ah, no: but only the Science of Statecraft, in an absolute liberty of space and time, the pure science of man, with no obligation now to cheat or to flatter.

What he writes in those hours, when it is vouchsafed him to feed on the food which is his alone, Machiavelli never claims for his own: he is merely making notes for memory, for how shall one come by knowledge, unless one retains what one has known and undergone? *The Prince* is not to be read as an original composition: but merely as the groundwork of Machiavelli's ideal conversations; or, if you wish, something even slighter than that: a fancy, as he says, like so many before it, which have found favor with his friends; a fancy withal worthy indeed of a prince's ear, and especially of a self-made prince, not, that is, of such as

stand pat and consume their capital but of those that are fresh and enterprising and mean to conquer their own.

With words thus modest Machiavelli apprises his friend the Ambassador of the appearance of a work, which was to torment humanity for centuries and still quickens thought and is far yet from having run its course.

The book was born between the blows of sorrow and the buckler of need. To Machiavelli's reverses we owe *The Prince*, its every page to misfortune, its every period to injustice, its every maxim to the knowledge men acquire through bitterness and despair.

I can never re-read that well-known letter without recalling Dante's line: *From the loins up, all you shall see . . . Dalla cintola in su, tutto il vedrai.* There, for me, I find Machiavelli at his highest, with that unseen majesty which is the birthright of genius, with that aureole which the common of men never see, with that crown which is woven of thorns and which furrows with blood the face of the great.

Such grandeur he must have shown the un-

knowing, when one day he replied to a man, who accused him of teaching tyrants the art of conquering power: "True, I have taught tyrants the art of conquering power, but I have taught nations as well the art of conquering tyrants."

IV

ITALY UNITED, ARMED, AND UNFROCKED

NOTE, first of all, on what a black, bleak and bottomless background the scenes of human life are played out: the sightless web of Chance, or of some Fate, which shuttles mortality to and fro, without whither or wherefore. We bear in ourselves the cause of our being, which is one with the cause of our dying.

Rampant in the foreground, dominant actors, the States: these grow, develop, decay and die, like men; and the identical urge, the self-same effort which makes them grow, strive, and devour their feebler neighbors, anon makes them stagnate, rot, breed decay, disintegrate and die at the hands of younger and stronger States. Their only hope lies in an intrepid physician, bold enough to resort to first principles; else Fate will not be outwitted.

Those heroic first principles a State owes always

to one man—to a hero. He is born of the whirlwind. He is no ascetic; he patters no paternosters. He is a row. A saint, if you like; but armed with a blade and a bludgeon. That blade, that bludgeon, are well meant. Woe, when men no longer shrink from the blade or run from the bludgeon!

Men are scum. They are greedy, miserly, lustful, faithless, thankless, selfish, or, worse yet, for the most part, slugs without will or brain, helpless to pursue right or wrong, wavering and prompt to yield to prod or pressure, with no sense of responsibility, victims of the first turn that chance takes.

This scum needs a hand to shape it, to blend and form it and make it perforce a little less yielding, verminous and invertebrate. The high ceramic art of moulding scum is politics. The potter is always a despot: he may wield a spit or knead spittle, he may boast himself inspired of God or stand attainted of infernal traffic, but he sets the mould and gives a value to what has none. This human scum has but two ways to go: to pot, with the pack, vagrant, scattered, snarling; or to the potter, in the organized humanity of the State. Laws make

men better by force; they force them to obey marriage bonds and the given word; they exact sacrifice for the community; they raise and spiritualize them.

Brawny enough to embrace and brave that mission are few! Few to want and few to dare "the common weal"; and those few, if they are really to benefit the blundering many, must follow certain norms.

Those norms are the same in all times and all places. Men being scum, wherever found, the rules for moulding them are not many and always alike. From the days of the ancients to our own, though leaders have changed, never the laws; and ancient republics like modern monarchies, modern republic like ancient monarchies, have all worked alike. The saint, to succeed, must copy the brigand.

Machiavelli meditates on the States and their fates, now and of yore; in the hard light of fact; without illusions; coldly and calmly. To debate what form of State is best seems to him a sheer waste of time. For ages and ages men have argued whether a monarchy be better than a republic, or the Pope above or below the Emperor. Machiavelli

smiles his knowing little smile, upsets the ages, and discovers new worlds ahead. He invents the political telescope long before Galileo discovers the spy-glass of the skies; and he turns his clear scrutiny on the constellations of the States, reading the laws of their being, their movements, and their extinction.

The vital principle of their natural life is the virtue of their citizens; but what is that *virtue* by which Machiavelli understands cruelty and sensitiveness, abominations and goodness, spirit and sloth, cunning and asperity, caution and courage?

Virtue, in Machiavelli's meaning, is merely human activity, the faculty of always meeting a fact squarely, seizing opportunity, acting swiftly and bringing to bear, in any given circumstance, one's utmost resources. This Machiavellic virtue is a concept unmistakably modern, devoid of all Christian content: it is a concept anti-Christian and anti-Catholic, because anti-passive. Virtue is the antithesis of goodness, without necessarily being evil: it is an activity superior both to good and ill.

Blessed with that understanding and his clairvoyant smile, he knew what to expect of his

countrymen. They were men too, and tremendously undisciplined and factious. There was far too much art, beauty and luxury in Italy. And therefore too much slackness and cowardice. What that wretched land needed was a man to set it back, with a little healthy barbarism, and make it less craven in war and more united in peace.

The greatest impediment to the unity and heroism of Italy Machiavelli saw in the Papacy. Entrenched in mid-Italy, it had always prevented a monarchy from uniting the Italians as a kingdom had moulded the French. The Papacy was too weak to become itself a master and a magnet in the land, but strong enough to obstruct that domination by another.

Besides, it was a stew of corruption. The religion of Christ might have been turned to good use, if the Popes had not brought it so low, that no one believed in it any longer. If the Italians are misbelievers to-day, they have their Popes to thank for it. And Machiavelli knew that for a great evil. No State can endure without faith. The ruler need not believe, but his subjects must. And laws are

not respected, really, unless they contain something arcane, mysterious and transcendental to set them beyond the pale of human criticism.

Cure the Italians of cowardice by force, and heal them of doubt by holiness: such were the most pressing needs of the moment. And it would not have been hard: individually the Italian surpassed the alien; collectively, he was slaughtered. Let him come then, but let him come and tarry not, a prince of high heart, to raise the banner, to rally the pick of the land, and lead Italy back to Roman principles, thanks to which Rome had been mighty and feared in the four corners of the world!

One day, over an inn-table, Machiavelli was rallying once more to that banner all the down-trodden of that over-run, devastated, degraded land of Italy. "Well," said his friends. "And what device would your banner bear?" Dipping his fore-finger into the wine, he traced on the table his banner, in its far-flung folds a cartel, and on the clean face of that cartel, in his best clerical hand: ITALY UNITED, ARMED, AND UNFROCKED.

V

DEAR AND RANK ITALY

LATE one October day Nicolo had turned down a lane which, winding among fields and farms, came out on a slope overlooking half of Tuscany. Here he found his favorite haunt, the ledge of a wayside shrine, conducive to reverie, where he would read or brood on the landscape below.

He turned each page with moody sighs, lapsing once more in his sorrows and those of Italy, which were no less his care. Afar he could see Florence, afar, forbidden. He could see the flanks of the Secchieta, stanch as those of a mountain bride, the peaks of the Mugellese Alps, measured and cloven like the crest of a fortress, and top after top of hills crowned with castles and villages. He had crossed those Alps and known those castles, their captains, their marts, their armies, their peoples. Of every village, castle, and countryside he would murmur the name like a known music lovingly

recalled and rehearse their late or long-forgotten vicissitudes. Puny despots, presumptuous lordlings, remorseless feuds between families, slaughters and proscriptions which had maimed or drained those folds, wars of guild or parish moved through his scornfully reminiscent mind. And his eye roamed on, over the Alps, into sunny Romagna and from there to the plains, hither and yon of the Po, affluent with cities and toil; or else through the vale of San Donato sped to Val d'Arno and wheeled, with the swiftness of thought, toward Arezzo, Chiana, Umbria and malarial Latium, and, as if he could see them, toward the barren lands of the South. And everywhere the same sight, the same old tale of feud and strife, of discord and civil war, of personal aptitudes ungoverned and lawless, the same fatal inability to agree and commune in common, the same field of slaughter without shelter or boundary, open on all sides to the foreigner.

He pondered the pride of that radiant day. The westering sun hung low in the sky, warming the air with mellow gold, ribbing every wall with pilloried shadow, bronzing the leaves of that re-

cumbent October, and making the panes of some distant castle shimmer and flash. Then, as if wrung by such beauty and abasement, he heard himself cry: "Dear, dear and rank Italy!"

"Dear and rank Italy"—he meant to say—"you are the bower of Europe, but you need a thorn-hedge to warn off the trespasser, and some well-laid-out walks to keep you clean and trim. May mine be the hands to plant that hedge!" And he choked back the memories more bitter than gall that clutched at his heart and throttled his thoughts, the memories of old and unhealed experiences as a lad, a citizen, an envoy, a recruiter, and an ambassador; he remembered that nothing would ever unite those Italians. Were they hopeless? Must one despair and surrender? Must one see them forever the prey of barbarians, who were men but in name? And liberty? What was it worth, after all, if it always led to slavery? What were those scuffles the Italians called liberty? What were those so-called free governments, now of clerics, now of nobles, now of bankers and traders, now of soldiers and barons, which employed their own power to rob those they dispossessed of their free-

dom? To unify Italy, crush her sects, ban her ambitions and feuds, would be not to quench but to bring liberty. Yes, though some were to die for it.

"These Italians are mad"—said he. "And with madmen you must use a noose and a scourge. You must bind and beat them. I see it coming. I see the scourge." And truly he did seem to see it, in a whirlwind afar, drawing nearer and nearer, darker and darker, obscuring the sun, blotting out the light, then flashing, falling, flaying.

The scourge is long, stout, swart and knotted. You see it in the thick of the whirlwind whirling. It is the vortex and voice of the hurricane. A little lopsided, swelling bit by bit, it gnarls to a knob, pocked yet with the sockets and eye-like scars of its lopped boughs. It is a purgative scourge, a horsewhipping hallelujah, or, better yet, the "black Jack" of the deal, the ace of clubs, King Cudgel or Ser Bastinado.

Ser Bastinado wheels, twirls, whines in the wind. Warns. Waits. Wallops. Heels, heads, ribs, buttocks, he whacks and wounds, whacks and splits, whacks and skins, whacks and kills, singing the song of the redundant flail.

A nation kneels and takes. Shiver and shake, none escape. Jack is big and Jack is black, Jack jilts none that wants his whack.

Whacks for one, whacks for two, raps individual, wholesale trouncings, licks in privy, public pummelling, lynchings up the alley, larrups on the square, palatial thumpings, bumpings across-country. Whing-a-bang-bang! Come up, come up, and get your whack.

Poles and pitchforks, brooms and cudgels, staves and switches, cat-o'-nine-tails, rolling-pins, curtain-rods and carpet-beaters, spits and spars, pound patriotically the march of progress on elbows, shins and rumps, cheer the flying coat-tails, and, marching as to war, flap clean consciences for flags. Up and down, up and down, without let-off or let-down, the mattress-maker pumps his progress. At last the mattress is clean and white and winnowed. Italy is made over, scoured, sifted, air-blown flake by flake.

The storm passed, the scourge vanished, the sun shone once more, embalming the clouds and mountaintops with vespral gold, with a long lingering

luminance slowly waning, never spent, for long after nightfall a redeeming gleam dwelt dimly in the Lenten dark. Nicolo wandered home, with his Ovid closed over his finger. The vision had left him heavy.

He came home, took off his dusty gown, slipped on his best Court robe, and entered his little study. Then, choosing his quill, he began to write gravely, translating his vision into solemn terms, in an exhortation to the Princes of Italy to free his country of sects and barbarians.

VI

A MATTER OF WHICH FOOT MACHIAVELLI FAVORED

NOW, though I have been able to tell you a great many things about Machiavelli, and such as you will not find in any standard biography, there are some matters yet which remain, to my mind, moot. For example: when Nicolo went to bed, which shoe did he shed first?

It is no secret, I take it, that in this matter men are of two kidney: some favor the left foot and then serve the right; others reach for the right and dally with the left. The right is more, may I say, handy? More unmistakably a man's own foot. The left is a bit offish; but, I must admit, the right hand gets at it better. From these native proclivities spring constitutional differences in men's habits.

Matters of small moment, you may say. I hope so. For I have failed, utterly failed, to verify them. Only Marietta or Barbara could enlighten me, and

they, alas, are far, far from our ken now, and it never occurred to them somehow that such things could matter one way or the other.

For my part, I deplore it, believing as I do that in a great man nothing is negligible, that in all things his genius is manifest. More than his labors, mind you, voice his vision! Far more. Why, even, I dare say, his way of tipping his hat affirms his philosophy; for, truly, does not everything in a man derive from his mind, and does not his mind transpire in all things?

Machiavelli's atheism, for example, so fundamental, so sincere, so all-informing, so absolute, may very well have affected certain intimate habits which no one was privileged to observe and upon which, therefore, we must remain non-committal: meaning, of course, his manner of removing his socks at night or of slipping them on in the morning.

Bah, you will say, scullery critics! No man, we well know, is a hero to his valet. Exactly: and therein, I maintain, greatness is most impressive, in being, genius apart, a plain nobody, with a nobody's appetites, loves, debts, colds, crotchets, just

like us, sir, just like us; yet not just like us, no, I qualify that, because even in scratching his itches a great man shows something peculiar and inimitable.

I maintain that a great man is great in dishing out soup, kissing his wife, washing his hands, or buttoning his pants. We have studied palmistry, handwriting, fingerpads, the texture of hair, the markings of the skin, visual deflections, ears, bumps, bellies, and have profited by them, deducing horoscopes, divinations, vaticinations, chiropodoxologies, and revelations of character; and why, pray, why should not other parts, other conformations, other manifestations, other sciences of the body have their value too? Is it not a running commonplace of language and thought to say that hunchbacks bring luck, the ugly are wicked, a ruddy skin means mischief, prominent lips betray sensuality, an energetic handshake augurs loyalty, and a hat at an angle denotes rakishness or felonious proclivities? and why then, I ask you, why should we not note, mark, and ponder other mannerisms, configurations and habits of the human

body, through which a man reveals unawares, and therefore most spontaneously, his own nature?

In conclusion it only remains for me to confess, that I have failed to recover certain irretrievable details of Machiavelli's life, which might have illumined and confirmed us in our conclusions. By way of amends, I shall ask the reader's permission to pause for a moment on the matter of Machiavelli's diet, a no less vital point, which I propose to treat in the next chapter and which, in the light of what has been said, will not, I trust, seem an imposition.

VII

WITH A DASH OF CATMINT, A PINCH OF SAGE, AND A WHIFF OF ROSEMARY

IN the first years of the sixteenth century the Florentine table, emancipated from the Mastodonic and unenlightened mediaeval pabula, made for the belly and not for the palate, had attained to some of its immortal masterpieces, which we have since been able to repeat but not to improve upon.

May I present then my compatriot, this grilled tenderloin, the pride of a calf's collop, still clinging, as you see, to the bone from which he was bred; observe his healthy complexion which, saving his youth, might seem, I admit, apoplectic, like a slab of red marble, veined with white stains; on either side fired to meet you and spruced up with a drip-drip of oil and a dash of pepper, salt, and parsley; no blame to you, beef, though you do blush, yet blush not but out-face the raw jowl of roast-beef, Albion's bloody darling, and the crusty

scowl of Milanese cutlets; for, believe me, you have nothing to fear by comparison.

Next, the Pistolese bean, the bean of all beans, the bean without pod, the bean as unsullied as the snows of the mountains which westward you beheld yet, dainty bean, in springtime enfolding the plain where you were born; stewed not in soda, as hasty housewives forget, but with patience, patience and garlic and sage-leaf, in water, I warn you, not over-abundant, allow me, bean, to present you at full-boil, with a sprinkle of fresh oil, vinegar and pepper—a mere whiff of pepper, perceptible, not pricking—for the bean that you are, with your brave, proud paunch, like a steward's, and remember that you too have immortalized the Florentines; for how runs the rhyme?

> Tom Florentine must have his bean,
> Lick his plate and lick it clean.

Nor let me forget my learned friend, the renowned pork-loaf named *àrista à la fiorentina*, who in 1439 won the hearts of the Greek popes, fled from mournful Basilea and assembled in Florence to treat of the union of the two Christian Churches,

whence comes his Orthodox name of *àrista*, signifying in the Greek tongue *peerless;* peerless pork-back, baked in the oven with prudent procrastination, seamed with rosemary, garlic and cloves, sprinkled with pepper and salt; often served cold, aye, and in your peerlessness best so; perdurable pork-back, twixt the roast and the salad, showing for weeks at a time your cheeks chubby and rosy as a maid's, your gravity tickled with a sprig of rosemary; never fear nor fall back, O peerless, before the *mortadellas*, the pig's-heads, the sausages, the hams, and the fennel-heads.

I have summoned you as spokesmen of the Florentine table, the loftiest examples I know of that fare light, lean, savory, full of pith and flavor, fit for active wits, foes to sedentary obesity; lords of a table that never knew *risotto*, never conceived *maccheroni*, a table that execrates fats and reveres the spit and the griddle, with their lustral flames of wood and coal; a flame that fries you its fries without grease and roasts you its roasts without drip.

You shall testify that Nicolo Machiavelli, like all serious-minded men, lost no time at table; but,

like all enlightened ones, that he relished the beauty and wholesomeness of a well-cooked meal; that he had far rather dine of a duck or a gosling in Florence than of nuts, figs, beans and boiled meat, as often he did, at the villa; but that he could do, if need be, with plain bread and water; that he was well pleased with a gift from his good Casavecchia of trout from the Pistoiese Rhine-waters, but no less delighted to munch mutton fresh from a Florentine fold, provided four friends would share it; and that he cared more for the quality of the talk than the quantity of the food.

Nicolo took his food, like his fate, as it came; he would munch his stale crust, musing on the fresh one which would be his yet, one day or another.

I fancy he repaired to the kitchen, in his own house or in that of his friends, more than once, and I can see him standing with a ladle or a pan in hand, brooding over the brown of a dish of fried brains, chicken and artichoke. More than once on his travels he must have noted down for his women-folk some memorable recipe. Smiling, and licking his lips, I see him consulting his table-fellows on

the issue of a fricassee prepared by his own rare hand and done, you may be sure, to a turn, with no less suspense than when he paused for judgment on his *Life of Castruccio Castracani* or his *Comedy of Messer Nicia.*

Machiavelli was partial to cooking in oil—one of the major geographical divisions of the globe: oil and butter-lovers. A distinction more galling than Gentile and Jew, black and white, Capitalist and Bolshevik.

Machiavelli was bi-lingual: he spoke both butter and oil. But he could never forget his mother-tongue. His style is the olive-style: dry, nervous, pithy and cogent, without shadows.

Bright though occasion might beckon, he would never be weaned from his fruits and his olives, and it is on record that, despite exile and torture, he replied to a friend, who urged him to join him in France: "Better to die of a dagger in Florence than of dyspepsia in proud Fontainebleau."

VIII

LOQUITUR MARIETTA

LADIES, your attention, please: this is for you. You that are wives of artists, writers, thinkers, intellectuals, this is my epistle to you. Or little, or more, or overmuch, you are all in the same sisterhood as Marietta. You all have to do with one of those monsters, one of those freaks of Nature, human only in name, known as "intellectuals": with their outlandish ideas, the bane of all sane living and patience and peace. I sympathise with you and propose to plead for you, dear ladies, defending Marietta, wife of Nicolo Machiavelli.

She alone could tell us what she saw and suffered, living with that freakish, impossible, nonsensical fellow, who would have the world his way, when after all the world was made quite another way. Marietta, I shall defend you and set you high above women, because you had your cross to bear, and Nicolo's.

Yes, living with an intellectual is no light matter. One day he works, and all is well, balls for the babies, beads for the wife, tips for the service, hay for the donkey; to-morrow the pen balks, and down come the heavens, the nation in mourning, birch for the brats, pooh for the wife, and the mule left kicking his stall.

Yes, I will defend you, Marietta, O good, calm, patient, sane Marietta. You had four children and how many millimeters of life to live yet, when Nicolo withdrew to the country and sat himself down to write, in democratic disgrace, *The Prince, la Mandragola,* and *Belfagorre.*

In democratic, not domestic disgrace; for, speaking of *Belfagorre* reminds me that in that deviltry you had no hand nor blame. No, the story of *Belfagorre* has nothing, I know, absolutely nothing to do with you.

For he was a devil, was *Belfagorre,* come to inquire what sins women make their husbands commit; and in behalf of that infernal mission, he had taken a wife, and of all places, in Florence! She was vain, for a fiend's lady, wilful, for a Florentine, proud, Heaven knows why, and clan-

nish, suspicious, venomous, spendthrift, bickering, shrewish, insufferable—a bugbear to her servants, her neighbors, and herself. Belfagorre, reduced by reason of that beldame from riches to prison and debt, finally, rather than suffer her one day more, took the homeward road to Hell.

Requiescat.

Now, when Marietta learns that that fable was composed in her honor, her blood boils, requiescat nothing, truth must out, and she will speak. Thus:

"Drat it! Drat it! Drat it! Belfagorre! Belfagorre! Belfagorre! Don't talk to me! Deviltry! Deviltry! What have I to do with deviltry? Many's the time, mark you, I've heard Nicolo say that mean tale was never meant for me, nor his neighbor's wife, nor the reader's. What have I to do with that creature—God, may she rot for it!—I, Marietta di Ludovico Corsini? A fine way to talk of his wife, that has borne like a Christian with all his spleen, his travels, his bats, his brats—the blessed rascal!—a great man you tell me he is, well, I'm happy to hear it, it's news to me though, I never knew it, for with all his learning and writing and

his fine friends and his toadying he never had a penny, not a penny that wasn't scraping and sweating to turn, till the lottery, the lottery of Venice, the only clear profit we made, three thousand florins he come home with, when he come home, allowing for what he lost on the way with those hussies, God blast them, the whole brazen lot! Mind you, I don't say he was mean, no, that he wasn't, you can't make me say that, he always did love me and the children, never let us want, no, not if he could help it. If you ask me, I'd sooner say he was heathen, a heretic, a Hebrew, never went to prayers, ate flesh o' Friday, Good Friday, and never had a good word for priests or friars or monks, God forgive him, for I know the Pope won't! Way down deep, though, he was a good Christian, better than many I know, frocks too, and had a heart in him as big as my lap, and generous, couldn't call his heart his own! It was those old books he went with every night instead of saying his prayers, that's what ruined him; and his friends always putting him up to some deviltry; and then that idea he had in his bean of being born for politics. If he'd listened to me, he'd have done bet-

ter to go in with his nephew, selling cloth. Always trotting off somewhere, to France, to Germany, to Lombardy and places you never heard the like of, without a road down the middle, and mail a week on the way, risking his precious health, and for what? If he dies, the new Signori, they won't make my loss good, will they? always with their hands in our pockets and no end to the wars! Why, I never saw Nicolo till we went to the villa and wished then I hadn't, with that widow-woman, like to be the death of us all, and him gallumphing over wood, over field, day after day, like a green boy, with forty-five years to his shame, writing madrigals he calls them and sing-songs and sending them by Capitino, who brings them to me to read before the Lady, the Beauty, ha-ha! ha-ha!

Troubles! Yes! I've had my share. But I never complained. You must give them their rope and remember it's genius; and some women are like wine, a glass does you good, when you're hot, but more turns your head.

Jealous? Why, Lord, I'd have been in my grave by now. I've seen him take up with some stewed ones: Sandra and Riccia and Mariscotta

and the widow-woman of the Impruneta and Barbara, and the others I don't know, in every country, wherever he went, always a new one! The blessed fool! Didn't care if his fruit was clean or mould. He had a stomach! Minnikin, Mannikin, fill my cannikin: that was Nicolo. Wouldn't stop for his coat. But he'd always come back. Don't I know? And so I forgave him and loved him no end.

But when he saw he was getting on, he sobered up a bit, and took some thought for his children. He was real pleased to know Guidino was studying singing and music, and he'd ask him, when he came home from his travels, how much he knew of the *Metamorphoses*, and Guido would tell him, and he would sit and listen till Kingdom come. Then he'd hug him and tell him he must become a wise man like his father, because the little wisdom he had had brought him honor in the world.

The poor fool! It was just a delusion. His wisdom never did a thing for him. It all came of believing the compliments of Cardinals and nobles and what not he hobnobbed with. Poor dear! Poor

dear! He'd never learn. There was always a position somewhere but never an opening, or else he'd be away, or in one way or another they would always back out. Handsome is as handsome does, I always say, and I've lived to prove it. And that's that.

Poor he lived and poor he died, and left us in need.

Now you come and tell me that in the great world he is talked of in every land and every tongue, including the Turkish. . . . Well, I'm pleased to hear it. But, you see, that's pretty cold comfort for a wife.

Well, anyway, say that I always loved him, and the story of *Belfagorre* has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with me."

IX

THE ORICELLARI GARDENS

HE lived at the villa and then in Florence, but longer and longer at the villa, when his term of exile was run. And lacking other mischief, in those days of disgrace, he wrote his best books. He wrote prose, the most beautiful in Italy, and verse, the most mediocre in the world; men in general he condemned and in particular ridiculed, with a full-flowing stomach, and most galling shafts for loose women, rash lovers, inane doctors, noxious parasites and pimping friars, in his comedy of *Mandragola*, one of the triumphs of the Italian theater, so your taste be not prim, and one of the best comedies in the world, if there be room left between Aristophanes and Molière.

When Machiavelli lived in Florence, he found solace in the groves of the Rucellai. The gardens, we should say, and as gardens they were known, though Latinified: *gli Orti Oricellari*. That name,

so resonant and illustrious to our ears, derived from a formula for dying, which had made the fortune of the Rucellai family. Noble names in those days were names nobly borne, and modest beginnings soon outgrown. To-day they serve more often as pedestals for mean wares.

Wealthy and unfortunate, Cosimo, the head of this house, lived in a wheel-chair. He was paralyzed; and his only solace was the conversation of his friends, among them Nicolo Machiavelli. He received in his garden like a benign king's son out of the *Arabian Nights*.

Gardens, in many Oriental lands, correspond to our Occidental drawing-rooms. No house of any pretensions can afford to be without one. The visitor never enters the house. He is received in the shade of a plane-tree or a soaring bamboo. He takes tea by a fountain; and the birds peck at his crumbs and sip up their unbrewed waters. The garden serves even as a seat for great sessions of sages, who in that hemisphere are priests, seers, or philosophers, or all three most judiciously in one.

Greece too philosophized in gardens and por-

ticos, pacing peacefully, or resting an argument on the branch of a tree.

But philosophy, when it left the East for the West and the South for the North, mewed itself up withindoors and drew all the blinds, to let no sound penetrate; and having thus defeated the visible world, began to eavesdrop on an inner one for the pulse of a life so painfully faint, that we can never be quite sure whether it is ours or another's.

In Machiavelli's day philosophy still dwelt in the open. Public life being well garrisoned against thought, it took refuge in gardens; and, unable to harangue from the balcony of the Signori, it lisped under the lethargic pine-greens.

I have never seen the Orti Oricellari, save from the street, and I confess to my chagrin that I can not describe them. To my chagrin indeed, when I think that there may yet be some trees there which Nicolo embraced, and on the bark of which he carved, I dare say, with a stout country knife his initials entwined with those of Barbara, the singer. But, be that as it may, seen them I have not and I scorn to invent. Anyway, who does not know what

a Florentine garden looks like? Who has not seen suddenly, down an alley, over a wall, the dome of a pine, the white bulbs of a candelabra of magnolia, the slim spire of a cypress studded in its spring season with horny gold acorns?

They are the wonder and delight of old Florence, those illuminations, which waylay the heart for the whole day, and I know no better way to cheer mine, than in roaming certain streets in search of such gladdening ambushes, wheeling about them again and again, unslaked by a glimpse.

For such cheer Cosimo's father had gathered in those grounds, once rank and wild with weeds and pools, many rare marvels, trees unknown transplanted with the utmost difficulty from alien lands; had filled them with statues, slabs, bas-reliefs and Roman columns, brought from Fiesole or dragged from Volterra; and raised there, fearless of man, rabbits, hare, deer, squirrel and porcupine; had planted them with evergreens, box-hedge and trellised lemon, with bowers of fruit of all seasons; and set gushing many freshets of water for the life of his gardens. Pergolas and festoons of grape and clusters of gourds overhead in the boughs com-

pleted this Eden, situate near the gate that leads to the town of Prato.

In the gardens of the Rucellai politics were not encouraged. But neither were drones, even when they came from the Medici; and anything in the shape of a pedant, a gull, or a boor was always fair game for satire and scoffing. A kind of opposition to the official and salaried school of philosophy throve there, fermenting with the acids of so many intelligences prompt to criticise. Liberals in profession, they were libertines in practise.

In one of these conclaves Machiavelli said of a great scholar of the Florentine School, a sort of Pico della Mirandola, who had reared book upon book of ill-digested learning: "True, there is nothing he does not know, but, alas, he knows nothing else." And another day, hearing of the cold welcome accorded the work of a young man full of motherwit but scant of sponsoring authorities, he pursed his lips and said: "That pupil has much to learn yet: Faculties must be fed with reading, not writing."

Naturally the butts of these shafts avenged themselves on Machiavelli, crowing over his er-

rors, counting his plagiarisms, denouncing his fabrications; and when he published his *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, a sort of historical romance in which he idealized the figure of that generous tyrant and valiant warrior, they buried him under a torrent of venomous and negative recrimination, charging him for good measure with scant patriotism in so glorifying a foe of the Florentines: all of which has not prevented the *Life* from being read to this day with keen pleasure and to the abundant glory of Florence and her genius, while their strictures lie forgotten in the dusty files of the academies of their day.

The greatest recreation of the young thinkers, whom Cosimo Rucellai bade to his gardens, was discussion. A true thinker must always be ready to challenge and discuss any subject, and I am sure that the lists were always open and that Nicolo was no laggard for the prize. There he formed a new set of friends and followers, more exalted than those of the Chancery, and the more intimate of them, being affluent, remembered him even in his lean days.

He made handsome returns by dedicating his

Discourses on the Ten Books of Livy to Zanobi Buondelmonte and Cosimo Rucellai, "not as to princes, but as to men worthy of being princes." Spurned by princes and republicans alike, Nicolo had at last come to realize that birds of his feather must flock together and perch above party and practical necessity, that a man of genius can have no other society and recognize no other law than that of genius: for the rest, within the limits of his self-respect, he must comply and cling where he can, recognizing the sorry but indisputable superiority of the flunkey to the philosopher.

In this connection there has been a tendency to criticise Machiavelli for the tyrannical intonation of his *Prince*, dedicated to a Medici, and the republican flavor of his *Discourses*, addressed to citizens of republican sympathies. The discrepancy has been cited as another calamitous example of his time-serving, and no doubt Machiavelli was not immune to such influences, being a man among men and a poor sinner in the sight of the Spirit; nor, to arm him against such infirmities, did he have the comforting faith of a

LORENZO DI PIERO DE'MEDICI
DUKE OF URBINO
By Bronzino (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)

bank balance or lands and revenues on the tax-books.

But we who can see him at the favorable distance of four hundred years should not overlook something which justifies his apparent change of pedal in the *Prince* and the *Discourses*.

And that is this.

Machiavelli was neither a monarchist nor a republican, because where others made a crusade of the "ideal" he made a mission of the "possible." He never asked himself which was the best type of government, but the most suitable. He knows that the needs of each nation are different. One has an innate inclination for livery and another an irresistible craving for brickbats and bully-baiting; one chooses its rulers by balloting for them, and another by shooting at them in the streets. When Machiavelli was consulted by Pope Clement VII on the best way of governing Florence, he advised him to maintain the republican form, not, however, out of any abstract love of republics, for he was careful to add that, had he been in Milan, he would have adopted an absolute monarchy.

Machiavelli labored under the curse of seeing things clearly; for the overwhelming majority of men 4 plus 5 make 3 or 10 or even 12; for Machiavelli 4 plus 5 made 9. A deplorable habit; and the man on the street is loth to forgive it, especially when the mania takes so obstinate and virulent form as the uncompromising advocacy of 4 plus 5 invariably making 9. Whisper it not in Gath . . . ! Men have been regarded with suspicion for lesser treasons. The least that can be said of one so wrong-headed is that he is *non compos*. In critical hours the partisans of 10 or 12 will call him a defeatist, those of 3 a courtier and a catspaw.

Machiavelli's advice was logical and historically sound, but it disgruntled the Medici and shocked the Populars. Like many a real thinker, he was too dispassionate for party passions and too disinterested for party interests. When a politician consults a philosopher, he assures him as a matter of form that he wants the truth, but it is tacitly understood that what he wants is an opinion in support of his policies.

That explains why the Medici kept Machiavelli

in ashes and sackcloth until 1519, the year in which finally, on the intercession of Lorenzo Strozzi, they consented to receive him once more in the fold. By now he was resigned, so completely disheartened in fact that he was thinking of teaching school in the country or applying to some nobleman for a post as secretary. At last in November 1520, on the recommendation of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, he was appointed chronicler to the Florentine Academy, at a salary of 100 florins a year. With patient perseverance, he set to work, assembling notes, reading reports and writing his *Florentine Chronicles,* which he had brought in 1525 to the year 1492, and which he presented to Pope Clement VII. Soderini who, however lifelessly, was still living in Rome, took his appointment much to heart and proved it by writing to Nicolo to offer him a position, first in Ragusa and later with a Roman nobleman, Prospero Colonna, as private secretary. Better that, he wrote, than to turn a tainted penny by writing Medicean history; but as usual he awoke, as luck would have it, an hour too late. And Nicolo acquitted himself very creditably indeed, with perfect dignity, writing, on a

Medicean commission, histories which have found favor even with Italian Republicans of a later day. He made respectable characters the mouthpiece of his own ideas, his own rebukes, his own hopes for Italy; he modelled with loving strokes his figures of tyrants and transmuted them into heroes; he did not inveigh against the enemies and assassins of the Medici, but he presented them in the perspective proper to the sacrifice which they made of their lives and the variety of their motives.

In the *Florentine Chronicles* there is a citizen who addresses a meeting in San Pier Scheraggio on the need of taking some measures against the perpetual disorders in the city, as follows: "The love which we bear, *Magnifici Signori*, to our city first made us abstain and now bids us come before you to debate of this evil, which we know to be great and daily increasing in our polity. . . . The common corruption of all the cities of Italy has infected and even yet infects our city. . . . Baneful men are as bees which are praised for their industry, and good men are blamed even as fools. And of a truth whatsoever is corruptible and corrupting in the cities of Italy is now come, like a

sore, to a head . . . and what is most pernicious is to mark how the motives and principles of parties, their aims and purposes, of a sudden, with a pious word, grow honest; because ever, albeit all foes to freedom, defending our land under color of a Constitution of Optimates or of Populars, they oppress her. For the prize they desire of victory is not the glory of gaining the liberty of their city but the satisfaction of overcoming their rivals and usurping their seat; in pursuit whereof there is no thing so unjust, so cruel, or so grasping, but they will be bold to do it. Whence it cometh that laws and ordinances are made not for the Republic but to their own profit. Whence it cometh that war and peace and amity are deliberated not for the common glory but the pleasure of a few. And if other cities are with such disorders overfull, ours more than another is so polluted; because laws, statutes, civic ordinances, not by free arbitrament but by the ambition of that party which remains uppermost, here prevail. . . ."

In such terms, under an anonymous disguise, the Florentine patriot in the year of grace 1521 addressed Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who paid him

(out of the bounty of his grace) one hundred florins a year. With such dignity could the great be served in those days, that they seem almost to be at the command of their dependents, when these were blessed with culture and genius.

X

BARBARA BARBERA

NICOLO consoled himself for Fortune's scant favor with his friends and with, well, women; and waited for better days. Meanwhile conversation was left him and love.

The women were not lettered or titled, and to meet them we need but knock at the back-door of a bake-shop or an inn. The scent is not civet, no matter. Villari holds his nose, not we; he shies at the bluntness of some letters of too Latin and Florentine a frankness; not we. Machiavelli called a punk a punk; and I see no reason why we should do otherwise.

Sandra di Pippo, whose hospitality we have noted; Mariscotta, who helped him kill time in Faenza; Riccia, who jeered the philosopher and dubbed him a spoilsport, but who loved him nevertheless with faith and with passion; the anonymous widow of the Impruneta, who snuffed his midnight

lamp: as friends of Machiavelli we owe them our recognition and gratitude. While politicians fed the poor Florentine gall, those willing, liberal and obliging Magdalens brought out their unhoarded myrrh and made him forget the miseries of masculine public life.

Nicolo Machiavelli was no pedant and I would not give five cents to hear him debating with Vittoria Colonna or other learned ladies. In platonic company he was mum.

He was a man of flesh and blood and the joy of many little gatherings of gossips, libertines, merrymen and chuckleheads. He was the life of the talk in the Oricellari Gardens, says a contemporary; and without him the Chancery was a workhouse for Biagio; and Nerli writes later that "now that you are gone, nor sport, nor pot-house, nor any small thing is to our fancy." That confounded sly Florentine, along with his gift of great vision, had an unholy knack for the nonsense, funniment, nicknames, prattle and catches indispensable to one who would shine in the fizgigs and tit-for-tat fence of that society. But to platonic ladies he said, I pass.

He was too sensible not to know just how far he could go with such company, without compromising the essentials of his life. The maxims he offers in that respect, in correspondence with Vettori, are worthy of figuring in a compendium of "Italian wisdom." He knew that of all fools the worst is he who would be wise all the live-long day, and he recommends us to pay due tribute to animal man, withholding for the spirit the things which are of it. To Cæsar—

So, when he concludes a political argument with a bawdy story, he is every whit the philosopher. "Were any man to read our letters, honored gossip"—he writes to Vettori—"and note their diversities, I wager he would be much amazed, for at one moment he would think us grave men, all wrapt in great matters, and would vow that never in our breasts could any thought dwell that was not nobly and lawfully conceived. Yet anon, turning the page, he would doubt if we be the same men, being now, as it seems, right light, inconstant, lecherous and blown with vanities. Now this manner of practise, if to some it seem unseemly, to me seems praiseworthy; for in this we imitate Na-

ture, which is manifold; and he that imitates her, let him fear no rebuke."

Let us then turn the page too and read him whole.

More than once Nicolo's loves outran the promptings of desire and the life of a fancy. He gave rein to his heart and seemed to find new youth, at fifty years, when he could neither sweat in the August sun, nor cool in the dark night, nor stale on the pebbles of the Impruneta his love for his widow-woman, so noble, so refined, so every way affable. For her he forgot all his cares, forsook his classics and let be his modern instances. Utterly translated, all his talk was of love, and whatever she would he would, and so should his friends, as witness Vettori, the Florentine Ambassador to Rome, who had to take time and thought to find some fine blue wool for the hose of the unknown fair: not the first nor the last time that the diplomatic valise has been decorated for gallantry.

The last of Machiavelli's passions was for a woman, who bore the fair name of Barbara and the fine surname of Salutati. Barbara Salutati, Barbara the Well-met, known also as Barbara the

Singer, from the profession which she exercised officially, was the wife of a certain Pietro Landi, a man of small means and small understanding, whose failure to afford her the support and satisfactions proper in a husband led her to seek these among the admirers of her talent and her beauty. She was frank and truthful; and to the critic of her conduct, who found her generous to a fault, she had only one answer, and that curt: "What's mine is mine, and I give as I list."

She is the only woman whose memory is linked with the labor and literary fame of Machiavelli, for she sang in the interludes of the *Mandragola* and the *Clizia* the little songs, which they composed and set to music together. Guicciardini proposed to engage her for a tour in Romagna, when he was thinking of having Machiavelli's plays performed in that province: a performance given in 1526 in Bologna, as in 1523 it had been given in Venice and maybe even in Rome in the Pope's presence.

Among Barbara's and Machiavelli's friends was Jacopo di Filipo, a wealthy furnace-man who lived near the Porta San Frediano. In 1525 he gave a performance of Machiavelli's *Clizia* on his

grounds. The land was levelled, and the largest room in the Factory was cleared of all workaday encumbrances and transformed by Andrea del Sarto and Aristotile di San Gallo into a theater. The hall was divided lengthwise by two rows of rustic columns, spanned with arches and hung with garlands. These formed on either side a beautiful, long, leafy arcade, with festoons of natural and artificial fruits and flowers. Behind the columns the artists hung lights, in many-hued, glowing, stone-shaped glasses, which bathed the whole hall. The beamed roof was concealed by a starry dome, in whose depths rolled an enormous moon. But the crowning invention was a wooden figure, representing an angel, trump in hand, suspended in front of the stage, which it flooded with light from an angle, so calculated as not to strike the eyes of the spectators.

Many illustrious guests were bidden to this feast, among others two of the Medici cubs, Alessandro and Ippolito, then under the tutelage of Cardinal Passerini da Cortona.

After the play a great feast was served. By an ingenious fancy, which was the host's own (and

greatly admired), every course was served to the accompaniment of an appropriate dumbshow, presented by maskers offering living counterparts of the fish, flesh and fowl served on the table. With the roast-lamb, for instance, came a band of youths as shepherds, carrying their snowy lambkins tied with red ribbons; and while your eyes and mouth were yet wet with that delight, and you knew not which to wipe first, came the trout of San Marcello and the barbel of Arno, followed by fishermen with poles, nets and bowls full of goldfish; and ere you recovered from a stray bone swallowed in open-mouthed surprise, you were startled by huntsmen with dogs, falcons and wicker cages, in hot pursuit of a platter of woodcocks and thrush. Each of these bands sang a brief song and sat down to table, amid many merry allusions and puns and innocent jests.

Credit for these many rare conceits went to Machiavelli for his genius, to Barbara for her art, and to the Furnace-man for his capacious purse. But Barbara was the bright particular star of the occasion.

Her name was Barbara, a name which she shared with uncivilized peoples and the horses of the Palio.

Decent folk and the Church would not hear of her. Her body was forbidden holy burial. Her soul was consigned to Hell. She was ugly and strangely attractive, like sorceresses. Dull women said she was ugly, and they were right. She was so ugly that you could not take your eyes off her; her moods transformed her.

Dressed as a nymph, she sang the songs Machiavelli had interspersed between the acts of his play. She wore a sleeveless bodice and a blue skirt, hitched at the waist to show her ankle shod in a gilded sandal. Over her black hair an ash-blond wig veiled her shoulders with loose flowing tresses, wound with a garland of artificial flowers. In one hand she carried a bow, and a quiver hung at her side; while her companions, similarly arrayed, but with a diaphanous veil over their arms, carried only a dart. She was attended by two shepherds, clad in skins caught across one shoulder and shod with leggings or sandals.

At a glance from Machiavelli they sang:

And ever in feasts and dulcet bliss
Fleet swains and festive nymphs are we.

With these our strains now are we
Come with a liberal harmony
Only to honor and bless this
So sweet feast and noble company.

At the close of the fourth act Barbara came out alone, invoking, with a glance at Machiavelli, the delights of love for Callimaco, who was now on the eve of his long-looked-for night with Lucrezia.

But her genius was at its best in less academic programs, as Machiavelli and his friends were privileged to know, after supper at night, alone. Then she would ruffle her own beautiful hair about her face, and without further ado, imitate her low-life friends, drawn from the dark memories of her childhood in the Borgo San Friano. A basket on her arm, and she was the country-maid selling eggs; a sunshade on her shoulder, the draper's dame swept her prosperous husband's fame to mass in aristocratic S. Trinità; a yellow shawl on her back, and the prostitute yawning in the sun discussed with her madam the art of snaring men and the miseries of her gilded condition. It was no conventional music she sang now; but suiting her words to the

monotonous and melancholy rhythms of a popular song, she would improvise on the tune of the Tuscan refrain:

Spin me the bobbin, spin it well

for which her powerful voice, with its occasional raw notes, seemed made.

That voice, those rhythms, those verses broken by the mood of the moment, brought to life familiar and hauntingly tragic existences: the girl who had buried her new-born babe in a gilly-flower bed, and watered them at nightfall, thinking on her lover; the woman with child, clasping her belly in terror, as she awaited the homecoming of the husband she had betrayed; the prostitute in the gutter for love of her man, who sleeps all day and fills his purse every evening from her pocket. In that voice so knowing and sympathetic all the world's pain passed: bitterness, irony, terror and tedium.

Nicolo, Jacopo and Barbara were the best of friends; Jacopo thought his money very well spent indeed, if it helped his friend and satisfied Bar-

bara; and she was delighted to charm her friends. When he was away, Nicolo would write her to ask if she still loved him; and she would reply that he was the darling of her eye, and when would he be home? for there was no man she loved more. Nicolo smiled his wry little smile, but he thought it was very sweet of her to say so anyway.

Beatrice? Laura? Heaven? Paradise? Machiavelli's lady was Barbara the Singer, Barbara the sinner, whom the Church condemned to be buried in unsanctified ground. But when Machiavelli hears her sing, a new life seems to run in his veins; how lightly time flies with her; and in her barbarous voice he hears the urge of the obscure and compelling Necessity which drives all things below, men and States alike, in a black vortex, up and down, around and around, without haven or aim; and what Barbara sings and he thinks of men seem to him one and the same thing.

XI

ONE MAN, ONE ALONE

NOW what did Machiavelli mean to all these men who knew him? The name of Machiavelli rings in our ears with the resonance of history. But for his contemporaries it was a name like another, the name of a functionary, or a good fellow, or a poor poet. It was a name without echo, like so many which we read in the papers or hear in conversation. He was John Doe. His life and death interested next to no one. His contemporaries would have thought it a wild joke, if they had been told that for ages and ages to come Machiavelli would haunt the minds of men of every temperament, in every form of myth; and a pretty mean one, if they were informed that posterity would recall certain outstanding men of that day, only because they had to do with Machiavelli.

One man and one alone understood Machiavelli in his own day: Francesco Guicciardini. Francesco

Guicciardini was his peer, pupil, comrade and, but for the fact that he was fourteen years younger, I should be tempted to add, his twin. A trifle, those fourteen years; but they are like the last few yards of a climb which carry you from one side of a mountain to the other and change the whole outlook. Guicciardini was fourteen years younger, or the world fourteen years older: he had the advantage of an experience which Machiavelli missed. Machiavelli came within sight of the summit and fell: before he could see the other slope. Guicciardini set out with the other slope almost in sight.

Machiavelli could hope, dream, prophesy. To him it was vouchsafed still to believe in Italian unity, to work for a native militia, to await the Prince, half lion, half fox, who should come and compose the sects and deliver Italy from the barbarians.

Guicciardini could not, because fourteen years later the decline had set in and Italy was running headlong down hill. Machiavelli and Guicciardini spoke the same tongue, held the same ideas, believed in the same ideals, viewed the vicissitudes of politics with the same disillusioned eyes, and

weighed them in the same scales of practical efficacy. In Machiavelli you feel the yearning of youth, in Guicciardini the surfeit of age, full of sadness and renunciation, scanning life with pity and detachment. At bottom Machiavelli is an apostle, denied by his day; Guicciardini is an ascetic, who has put by men and their passions.

For some years, Machiavelli's last and Guicciardini's first in public life, they were friends. Guicciardini had returned from Spain, whither he had been sent as ambassador in early youth, a post sufficiently far from Florence to allow him to weather in safety the crisis of 1512, in which Machiavelli lost his position. Clinging to the skirts of the Medici, he went a long way, thanks to them and to his native ability. In 1521 he was Papal Governor of Modena and Reggio Emilia, and from that moment begins a correspondence between him and Machiavelli, the playful and happy tone of which proves of how long standing must have been their intimacy and mutual esteem.

For all his reiterated proofs and protestations of loyalty to the government, Machiavelli had not yet regained the good graces of those wary Medici.

The faithful servant of the State was still denied the only employments which he thought worthy of him. Nevertheless, in 1521, they saw fit to entrust him with a mission—none other than to ride over to Carpi, to pick up a preacher for the Florentine Lent!

Was ever such irony? Machiavelli and Guicciardini wrote to each other daily, enjoying the joke hugely, exchanging the most joyous reflections on the friars and the bitterest meditations on Brother Machiavelli. Their anticlerical instinct burned at white heat, lancing, with practised wit, the humbugs and drones of that Commonweal of Fools.

When the courier comes, the courier of His Excellency the Governor of Modena, the whole hive hums with curiosity and monastic midwifery. Machiavelli makes the most of it to call for new sheets for such a big boy as he hopes now they know him to be. He begs his friend to abet him: let him send a courier every day, hot-foot: the brethren will give him his breakfast in bed.

Their correspondence continues in this wise: "Beware," writes Guicciardini, "beware, my bully, beware, lest those vices of lying and hypocrisy rub

off on you now: these are not monks only, but men of Carpi." And Machiavelli: "Never fear, in hypocrisy I have had baptism, chrism and communion; and for that small matter of lies I am a doctor and hold my degrees. Life has taught me to confound false and true, till no man know neither." And he unfolds to the brethren the latest political tit-bits come by air: stirrings of Switzers, rumblings of Emperors, colloquys of Kings; and the numbskulls stand around, skull-cap in hand, gaping and beating his bed and buttering his bread.

Poor Machiavelli! Guicciardini used to liken him to Lysander, who, after a lifetime of triumphs and trophies, was hired to distribute meat to the very soldiers he had gloriously commanded. Picking a preacher in a priory, after so many negotiations with kings, dukes, and princes! Moreover, he cannot find his man; for the man he wants is one who will show the Florentines the way to Hell, not to Heaven, some mad, mealy-mouthed, shrewd humbug, master of every vice known to the pious rascals previously tried in Florence.

Guicciardini gives every possible proof of his esteem and affection for Machiavelli: he begs him

to forego those flourishes of *Illustre, Eccellente,* and *Magnifico,* with which he superscribes his letters, on pain of being paid in the same coin; and he addresses him often as *very dear brother,* a title undoubtedly his due. The partnership is perfect: secrets of State and of bedfellows they share alike. Sometimes Machiavelli turns expert and appraises a villa which Guicciardini would buy; and then the letter reads like an agent's or an overseer's. Sometimes, knowing his friend's weak spot, Machiavelli tries to combine a match for one of his daughters, urging him to ask the Pope for a dowry; and then the letter takes on the tone of a marriage-broker. Guicciardini does his best to help him and restore him to political activity; and towards the end of his life we find Machiavelli entrusted by the Medici with a commission to accompany the army of the League and to serve as ambassador to Andrea Doria. But always minor and side-stepping missions: enough to compromise him in the eyes of the republicans, who return to power in 1527, and not enough to satisfy his need of political activity.

In the letters of these sworn brothers of Florentine political thought, "parlor politics" often ap-

pear; but more often in the case of Machiavelli, because he more than his brother had occasion to sigh and say: "If I were. . . ." The other could sigh and say: "Since I am. . . ." In Guicciardini's reserve we feel a man more conversant with public life, who is careful not to commit himself, knowing how fallible all forecasts are, and how changeable the times. The "wise" Guicciardini prompts the suspicion that he looks on his older and unfortunate friend as a slightly eccentric fellow, whose prescriptions, full of novelty and original inventions as they are, he finds highly instructive and entertaining, but as to the application of which he reserves judgment. If the rabble, who could not understand Machiavelli, refused to honor him, no wonder; but the one man who did understand him, the only one who was his equal, who spoke his language and handled his tools, was equally reserved, because he found him imprudent and insufficiently grounded in the ways of the world. Guicciardini was really a Machiavelli, giving points to Machiavelli himself.

In 1521 Machiavelli had not given up hope of a national militia: he proposes to the Pope that he

arm the natives of Romagna; and at the mere name of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, he takes fire. Here was a new rising star. He writes a letter as beautiful—has said one of his critics—as an octave by Ariosto. I quote it:

"Of late it is said in Florence that the Lord Giovanni de' Medici rallies volunteers to make war where best it beseems him. This rumor moved me to think that the people speaks what should of a truth be done. All men, I dare swear, are of one mind in this, that there is no man in Italy more loved of his soldiers or more feared and respected of the Spaniards. All men moreover hold Lord Giovanni to be bold, fiery, of great conceits, and a cleaver to high resolves: well then if, secretly swelling him, we give him his will, putting under him what foot and horse we may . . . and were this brought to pass, full soon, I warrant, would he make the Spanish heads spin and their designs to vary."

These raptures left Guicciardini unconvinced. He was a professional pessimist, skeptical and sad. More cautious and realistic than his twin, he opposed the scheme of a military levy in Romagna,

for he knew by experience the factious and separatist spirit of the Romagnoli.

In matters of love too the younger gave lessons to the elder. Guicciardini upheld married, modest and honest women against the mercenary tribe, with their wiles and arts and blandishments, whom Machiavelli preferred. Well, well! Barbara? A charming woman, an attractive woman, the joy of Nicolo's heart, no doubt; but an honest wench has her merits for all that, and no blame if she is a bit stiff and shrewish, because she cares but to please one man and not one man more.

Thus from grave topics they turned to trivial, persuaded that no man is so mad as he who would never be senseless; and that a good laugh is worth any man's philosophy. Guicciardini was a great admirer of *The Comedy of Messer Nicia, or The Draught of Mandragola*; and he commissioned a performance of it in Romagna, for his and his friends' entertainment. He was the more in need of slaking his liver with that excellent bit of fooling, that his blood was sluggish with care for the future of Italy. Laughter he could command, but, alas, not the future of Italy. For this "tour" Ma-

chiavelli wrote songs and incidental music to be played between the acts.

Can you conceive to-day of a philosopher of history and a governor-general putting their heads together to write lyrics for an intimate revue and engage actresses for a season in the provinces? There was still in those times a lightness of temperament, one feels, which is now but a memory, a legacy long since consumed by our forefathers. And where is the historian to-day philosophical enough to even record it?

Guicciardini remembered Machiavelli even after his death. One of his little essays was written to refute the *Discourses on the Ten Books of Livy*. To Machiavelli's theories he opposed his experience. The thought of Machiavelli pursued him also in his *Ricordi Politici e Civili*, reminiscences of private and public life haunted by an insistent and compelling, often acknowledged and cited, but sometimes challenged spectre. The conversation continues between the twins even beyond the grave.

But between them there were always those fourteen years. Guicciardini sees every hope fade, every bubble vanish, every fruit rot before its

time. Italy in the act of giving birth to the modern world had defeated herself.

For Guicciardini there is nothing left but thought. Fallen into disfavor with Cosimo I, whom he had helped to the throne, he too, like Machiavelli, is obliged to retire to the country and spend his days in writing, thought, and study. He declines to go into exile, like previous expatriates, to work for the return of a party with the arms of the foreigner. He is too noble and too wise for that. His retirement is renunciation, contempt and satiety. Critics have hardly been fair to Guicciardini in these last years of his life. He has been dismissed as an ambitious failure and characterless courtier, whose life had been spent in clothing his nakedness against death. There is more to him than that: something deeper and more significant.

Civic life was dead, or dying. The citizens of old had become subjects. Cæsar and Pope were drawing a cordon about Italy, combining to quarantine her against Lutheran infection and modern thought. The dread of the great Calvinistic revolution lay like a nightmare on the mighty. The wealthy Catholic world defended itself as it

could. Thinkers might die on the pyre or the block for the rights of Free Thought and Liberty against tyrants and priests. But then what? Would the nation rise? Never.

For the thinking Italian another revolution was left, and he achieved it. It lay in proclaiming his own inner liberty. Withdrawing from the world, he rendered formal tribute to his civil and religious masters. He went to mass, tipped his hat, observed all the outward signs of conviction and respect, without feeling the one or the other. In his heart he laughed at priests and reckoned at their true value his sometimes intelligent, but more often futile and obtuse rulers. And he turned to thought, song and dream. He buttressed his heart with an impenetrable wall of scorn and indifference.

Oh, he must lift his hat, must he? Very well. He lifts his hat. *Your Excellency* to imbeciles, and *Your Honor* to brigands: well and good. Your Italian will not haggle over terms or taste: at home brigand and imbecile go down the same drain. Compelled to a daily exercise of simulation and dissimulation, the Italian soon became proficient in political "aptitude." His character never re-

covered from it. His adaptability to circumstances was to thank, if civilization reached a degree of maturity perilously close to decay; and when that dead rot had set in, he carried its secret lightly, with the contemptuous grace of a great lord, and always with a certain intimate shame. Through the formulas and hollow panegyrics imposed by inquisitors and invaders, by absolute princes and ignorant plebeians, the Italian of culture and breeding smuggled to the world his poetry, his inventions and discoveries, and the intimate sorrow of a race, which had known and tested all things and reached the ripe wisdom of resignation.

As Saint Benedict in the Dark Ages, feeling the futility of resisting the Barbarians, deprived of all but his pride, disgusted by the vulgarity and materialism besetting him, turned, to save the supreme reasons of life, to the caverns and solitudes and there created the hermitages, where civilization took refuge and nursed the seeds of the future Rebirth, so Guicciardini in his villa of Finocchieto founded the first lay hermitage of Italian civic life, took refuge in hypocrisy, armed himself with silence and the semblance of submission,

and leaving in his *Ricordi* one of the earliest examples of an intimate and secret literature addressed to the initiate alone, transmitted to the future a handful of those embers of thought, which were to kindle the fires of independence and the Italian *Risorgimento*.

XII

WHEREIN THE NAME OF MACHIAVELLI ENCOUNTERS SOME OPPOSITION

THE gates of Italy were still open. Since the days when Charles VIII entered them in 1492, no prince in Italy had cared or dared to close or guard them. So, after Mont Blanc, the Gothard opened, and the Brenner, and the Argentiera, each discharging hordes of dashing Germans and rollicking Gascons, and, since the seaports no longer charged duty on Spaniards, her plains became the battlefield on which Francois I and Charles V measured arms for the supremacy of Europe.

The next twenty-five years are a whirlwind of war, broken by brief truces, in the suction of which the little Italian principalities, including that of the Pope, dance a ludicrous whirligig around the foreign champions, seeking now to combine, now to betray, now to fight, now to flee, forever incapable of a loyal league, a tenacious resolve, a

far-sighted plan. Above all these mice and wheeling flittermice one man stands out, a lonely and ineffectual exception, Julius II, the adventurous Savonese, who had resolved to free Italy from the Barbarians. But the defeat of that ideal was sealed and branded on the satanic holiday of the Sack of Rome; when lancers, Lutherans and devout Spanish soldiers occupied Rome with hardly a blow and, from the Pope (who had shut himself in Sant' Angelo) down, despoiled and defamed all they encountered: cardinals, priests, gentlewomen and courtesans, churches and brothels, galleries and shops. The purple-clad lancer, with a courtesan on the croup of his mount, leading in a leash an obese cardinal, cringing and beaten, is the literal image of a disaster which shook every city in Italy and put a great fear into the hearts of the Florentines.

No so great though, but what the factions seized the opportunity to stir. After the death of Lorenzo and Giuliano the power had passed to two lads, left in the tutelage of a castrate cardinal, with neither hamstring nor head: so that the city was governed from Rome by a Medicean Pope. The

downfall of the Pope was the signal for the noble families of Florence to rebel, and first with a riot and then an appeal to arms to defend the city against the armies of Charles V, they succeeded in driving out the Medici. But it is easier to start a revolution than to check one, and once under way nothing will stop it but the bottom, where the peoples find either peace or ruin or reaction. Thus it was with this one: slipping from the hands of the Ottimati to those of the Arrabiati, it ended with the siege of Florence and the final collapse of the Republic.

Our luckless Machiavelli had just begun to regain the favor of the Pope, in great measure due to the good offices of Guicciardini: and little by little after the commission to write the *Chronicles*, he had been given odd jobs about the House of Medici. His mission to the Commonweal of Fools concluded amid general hilarity, he had been sent to Lucca to look into some complaints of false coinage and the activities of a certain Guinigi; then to Modena to Guicciardini to discuss Papal projects; then, commissioned with the rebuilding of

the walls of Florence, back to his papers, ledgers and accounts; finally he had been dispatched to the army of the League, which was to fight the Spaniards and Charles V but which instead spent itself, in uncontrollable patriotic anticipation, in bickering with itself—a campaign financially ruinous and futile from the point of view of military effectiveness.

When the Florentine revolution broke out, Machiavelli was in Civitavecchia, and he immediately hastened home. While he was still at sea, he had a first premonition of that bitter remorse which was to poison all his last days. He felt how far inferior Clement VII was to the needs of the hour: a prince barely equal to peace or war but not to both together; and he rued his connection with him. However, what was done was done; to turn back now was out of the question; he must face whatever awaited him. A government democratic in form at least had been restored; the General Council ruled the Palace; and a secretary of the reborn Republic with Machiavelli's long experience of peace and war would be hard to find. In

the first days of June Machiavelli presented his application. On the tenth it came up for discussion.

The new rulers of Florence were flushed with triumph; those who for fifteen years had concealed their Savonarolian or Republican sympathies now displayed them, dilated them, sublimated them; the lukewarm revealed an unsuspected ardor; and many Mediceans, to expiate their past services, clamored rabidly for republican measures of uncompromising severity.

All this was far from Machiavelli's mind. He was thinking only of his country. Writing to Vettori a few days before, he had revealed the depth of that feeling in one of those spontaneous formulas, which are rediscovered in the heat of sincerity though they re-echo long-familiar platitudes: "I love"—writes Machiavelli—"I love my country more than my very soul." With that love, with the passion inspired by the fear of seeing Italy subject, as it later was, to Spanish rule, with anguish for the inability of his countrymen to unite, to fight, to grow up, to take risks rather than precautions, with the panic of a man who sees his

loved one in imminent and irreparable danger and strains every nerve to save her, Machiavelli presented his candidacy to a group of victorious partisans eager to claim the spoils of battle and wreak the revenges rankling for fifteen years silent and unsatisfied.

What ensued is recorded in the minutes of the meeting of June 10, 1527, which I reprint in their entirety.

Minutes of the General Council of Florence. Afternoon session, June 10, 1527. Present: 567 Councillors. Absent: 23. Excused: 20.

Chairman, His Excellency Nicolo di Gino Capponi Gonfaloniere of the Commune.

Nomination proposed as Secretary of the Republic of Florence of Nicolo di Bernardo Machiavelli, by profession a chronicler.

The meeting is open for discussion.

Bernardo Avancini. Not in favor. Machiavelli served the Republic and betrayed it. Machiavelli has been a Medicean. Machiavelli drew a pension from Pope Clement VII.

Fortunato Bozzachini. Not in favor. Machiavelli has always spoken ill of Florence and the Florentines. He has written that Florence is the loadstone of quacks, as if we were all webfeet. He has called us the most divided of all Republics. He has accused us of niggardliness.

Agnolo Morlacchi. Not in favor. Machiavelli has never had a good word for a Florentine. Mr. Morlacchi remembers comedies in which most distinguished citizens were baffled. His nomination would be a scandal.

Fortunato Bozzachini. Not in favor. Machiavelli has left Florence too often and has learned to find fault with his native city by living abroad. Nothing suits him here. If he is so fond of his foreigners, let him go and live with them.

Luigi Alemanni. In favor. Nicolo Machiavelli has always worked for the welfare of his country. No one has so great a knowledge of politics. The years he spent in the Palace were not spent crap-shooting. If he stands well with the foreigner, so much the better, he will be all the more valuable to the Republic. And when all is said and done, he is an honorable man, who has served us for

years and has not a florin to bless his heart with.

MEMMO POGESCHI. Not in favor. Machiavelli is not what he calls a Florentine. He has always been snotty about the way we did things here in Florence; he has always admired the Nordics; he has taken foreign gold. He is not a good Italian.

LEONE DELLI ALBIZZI. Not in favor. He can not trust Machiavelli. Machiavelli is an intellectual. . . .

(*Cries of:* "Down with Intellectuals!")

. . . and you never know where you are at with him. What the Country needs is men it can trust, not men who think they think. Machiavelli justifies everyone in his Histories: he has praised tyrants and excused their assassins. That may be all very well when you are writing History, but not when you are making it. I thank you.

CARLO TONSINGHI. Not in favor. Machiavelli with that everlasting little smile of his is too damned superior. How does he get that way? That is not the proper spirit for a good Republican, or a good Democrat, or a good Citizen.

NICOLA ZAFFI. Not in favor. In the days of Duke

Valentino, Machiavelli was too partial to him and could not praise him enough. I leave you to draw your own conclusions. He was undoubtedly figuring on a Ministry. He would be quite capable of betraying us, if a new Valentino appeared. How can an admirer of Cæsar Borgia be a good Republican?

LANFREDIN LANFREDINI. Not in favor. Machiavelli leads a disreputable and irreligious life. Was he not discovered eating flesh on Good Friday? Who ever saw him at church? He is worse than the Lutherans, at least they attend church!

TOTO BRACCIOLINI. Not in favor. Machiavelli has taught the rich how to rob the poor.

MASO VINCIGUERRA. And the Medici how to take the power from the people.

A PIAGNONE. He has maligned Savonarola.

(THE COUNCIL: Uh, uh, uhuh!)

LUIGI ALEMANNI. Oh, for God's sake, listen! Drop your knitting: this is serious. Machiavelli is the one man we can trust. Who else can you name? How many here were republicans the day before yesterday?

(*Cries of:* Booh! Bah!—Bloody—Cut the cursing!—Where was he, when we were in the streets fighting for Liberty and the People, and shouting: Down with the Balls!??? We risked our lives. Where are his wounds? Show us your scars. Here's ours. We fought. Slacker! Slacker! Slacker!)

(*Other cries of:* Where was he? He was in the pot-house.)

(*Other cries of:* Pot-house? Hell, no! In the library, reading books.)

(*Other cries of:* Down with books! Down with philosophers! We want no philosophers!)

(*Other cries of:* Put it to a vote! The vote, the vote!)

THE GONFALONIERE. I call for a vote on the motion to nominate as Secretary of the Republic Nicolo di Bernardo Machiavelli.

The ballot discloses: 555 blackballs, 12 white.

Motion thrown out.

A motion to ratify the nomination of Francesco

Turagi as Secretary proposed. Motion approved without comment.

(N. B. It needs none. When your name is Francesco Turagi, what is there left to say?)

XIII

TWELVE DAYS

WHEN the news reached Nicolo, he curled up and died. What else could he do? He was too sick: sick with old heartburnings, old wounds, old rebuffs, sick with insults and mortifications borne till that day and laid away and hidden, in hope of relief; borne as a burden one day to be shed; and upon which, far from it, one lash more is laid, one blow yet more cutting, one kick yet more galling, a deeper delusion, a ranker offense, a humiliation more crude, a harder burden. His old grievances break out, inflamed with his new.

Every nerve aches, every bone smarts with remorse, reproaches, doubts, ominous premonitions. What now? Once more the wheel had come full circle, once more he was cut off from his country, rebuffed where he would serve, he who alone knew her dangers. What now? Return to the villa? He had pieced together painfully a new life, a sem-

blance of life, shuttling to and fro between the Pope and the army, Doria and Guicciardini, grateful for any least traffic in political affairs, the only things that mattered to him. Must he really go back now to the yokels of Percussina?

At the mere thought of the inn of S. Andrea with its tumblers and pots full of grease and swill, his gorge rises; too late and too long had he fed from the lips of His Eloquence Cardinal Cybo, His Excellency Captain Giovanni of the Black Banners, His Honor Master Francesco Guicciardini, His Illustrious Matteo di Bandello and so many other distinguished gentlemen.

Age, too, was creeping upon him. Every day his knees ached, as he climbed the stairs of his house beyond the Ponte Vecchio. Malign humors coursed through his limbs, vexed his digestion, and he would sit after supper with his head on the table, unable to raise it.

And always that thought gnawing and gnawing, with its slow insistent corrosion: What can I do now? The future was infinitely alarming for Italy and impenetrably black for Florence. The foolhardy and inefficient Republicans, who had fol-

lowed the feeble Medici, were hardly the men to be at the helm of a vessel so storm-driven. Italy was awash with alien armies, rutilant for war, led by seasoned captains, and for Florence he saw nothing ahead but a long disintegration, the outbound disaster of the claypot and the iron bowl.

And for himself Machiavelli saw a drab, monotonous, vile life: with famine or pest one day for his family, at the heels of some new Spanish or German invasion. He was alone, poor, forsaken. In the days of his disgrace all had left him, all but a few faithful ones.

It was as if an armor he had worn all his life were now snapping, cracking inch by inch, joint by joint: the armor of his faith in his country and his duty as a citizen. His country had rejected him not once but many times; it had no use for him; it was a stepmother, not a mother. What was he to do now? It was too late to think of a new life. Suddenly he felt himself bereft, naked, a great chill at his heart, and he took to his bed.

Shivering, he murmured:—Here I lie, bare, unshielded: in the world now I have nothing to do: I am put away by my own people. All that sus-

tained me is lost. My Country: how blind my faith in her; and what is she? Maybe I was wrong; maybe I should have thought more of myself and less of the common good—Utopia! What has it all come to? the years of sacrifice? the fawning on men and serving of masters worth so much less than I?

Wrath and remorse grew in him and left him aching in every limb, like a man flayed alive. Every thing, every thought spoke of defeat and stung him to the quick. A whole life wasted, he would mutter over and over: a whole life lost, useless, pointless; his wife, his children, even his favorite books, he turned his eyes from them in detachment and scorn. In nothing could he take pride now or pleasure.

He remembered with aversion his discourses and eulogies on the great men of State and of war, with whom he had negotiated. A wretched old chain, received as a gift from Valentino, which he had preserved among his precious relics, recurred to him now as an abominable reminder of a great error, an evil love, a fruitless passion. Every word spoken or heard roused a nausea of

scorn, a heartfelt conviction of futility and fierce detachment from all the things of this world.

The whole problem of the tie between a man and his Country was transformed in the searing insight of his renewed disgrace. Like a mysterious Sphinx, his Country seemed to bend over its victims, sucking the blood of each of its citizens, and when it had drained them, tossing aside their remains. Where was the justice of it, that the dugs of such a mother should be dry, and her rites a bloody sacrifice of her own sons? Should she not love her most stalwart, exalt their virtue, encourage their efforts, and sustain those that faltered?

What was this Country? What was it, after all? What was this Italy? He recalled the reply of Ludovico Il Moro: "I have never laid eyes on it." Italy—Italy was Francesco Tarugi, Italy was that nullity, that inglorious, empty, colorless hack his rival; it was Pietro Ardinghelli, the venal and thieving secretary; it was Nicolo Michelozzi, that vile creature, that blind tool of the Signori; it was Pier Soderini, the republican of half-measures; it was Giuliano de' Medici, a prince and a drone among harlots. His country was the

conclave of all these mean, ignorant, uninspired souls, all these *minus habentes*, all inferior to him, all incapable of understanding, appreciating, grasping, penetrating the secrets of human laws as he could. And to these he must yield yet again? Supine, ungrateful Land!

The only good hours of his life now seemed to him those spent with the ancient writers. With them, at least, there was no delusion, no ingratitude or misunderstanding. The idle days at the villa were the only ones he would willingly re-live, divorced from all other cares, subject to none of the compromising necessities of life. He would gladly have returned, heedless of food or drink, torturing ambition or rivalries among men, to a state of pure spirit among spirits, in a realm far from all mundane moil, in a loftier Land of Home where the Ardinghelli, the Tarugi, the Soderini, the Medici, would be not even a disconsolate memory. Away, away with them all: think on them no more! He wanted to banish them, never to look on them again, never to think of them, to raze them from his life. He tossed, he struggled in his bed,

addressing his great, his true, his only friends, Livy and Tacitus and Dante and Petrarch. A raging obsession seized him, as of one who would strip himself bare and could not, and he groaned aloud, feeling on his aching flesh, raw as if with ripe wounds, the weight and suction of other integuments. Off, off with them all, those men, those ideas—off, off! And he raved on, until sleep fell on him.

Now he seemed to be come among a multitude of outcasts, of starving, of maimed, of lepers, of the filthy, the imbecile, the mad; and asking who they were, he was told that these were the inheritors of Paradise, of whom it was written: *Beati pauperes, quoniam ipsorum est regnum coelorum.* (Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.) And these being passed from sight, other visions appeared, numberless as the sea sands, and full of gravity and decorum, who like men in a Senate in solemn session treated grave matters of State; and asking who they were, he was told that these were the souls of the

damned, of whom it was written: *Sapientia huius sæculi inimica est Dei.* (The wisdom of this world is contrary to God.)

These in turn faded, and a voice asked Machiavelli with whom he would go: and he replied promptly that with these last he would go, because with them only could he find peace.

When he awoke, at his bedside stood his friends, Filippo Strozzi, Zanobi Buondelmonti, Luigi Alemanni, Francesco del Neri, and Jacopo Nardi; and at the sight of them he took heart, and once more his faint little smile twisted his lips. Grateful for their company, he told them his dream, which they commented with comforting profanity.

And thus, with a jest, he drew nigh to death.

He treated himself with an old household remedy. It was a prescription of pills, of which a letter of Guicciardini's has left us the formula, the effect of which, so far as we can judge, was that at best it could do him no harm.

Here is the formula:

Hepatic Aloes	1½	ounces.
Chamoedrys	1	ounce.
Saffron	½	"

Myrrh	½	ounce.
Betony	½	"
Burnet	½	"
Bol Armenia	½	"

Did he take an over-dose? Did it hasten his end? No one knows.

His malady grew worse and fastened on him.

He felt as if he were already a corpse, every limb weak and weighing when he tried to move it, and he seemed to be stinking, as if decomposition had set in. It was a kind of moral death, which had been eating away for years all reason for living and now left him hollow and empty. He upbraided himself for all the compliances of his life, the unfelt eulogies, the expedient dedications, the tacit evasions, for acquiescing in the Medicean tyranny and serving the feeble sway of Soderini. In every encounter, at every yielding, he had lost something of himself. He had yielded and temporized always in the hope that later. . . . How many plans gone wrong! But why had he planned? Men were not meant to plan.

What ever possessed him to think that men pursue their advantage? Fool! Fool! Would it were

so! But that race of scum is not even capable of reasoning. If it could reason, it could be mastered and led; if it pursued its advantage, it could be convinced. But men are a rabble of madmen, who pursue their own vain imaginings and the crass figments which shrewder than they implant in their fickle and hollow minds.

His contempt for men—and for himself—grew, as his disease grew. The death which he felt entrenched in him and no longer to be gainsaid, he now delighted in abetting, in running before and ushering past the last rally. With a penetration and perspicacity he had never shown in life, he studied his malady and took a cruel delight in stripping himself, in condemning himself, in making himself die. Bulletin in hand, he vetoed all his hopes and wrote them void: he had been deceived in Valentino, deceived in Lorenzo de' Medici, deceived in Signor Giovanni, deceived in the Italian people and in his own Florentines, incapable of taking form as a State, even under the compulsion of a hero.

Step by step, as his ruthless analysis progressed, his malady grew worse; his body had grown old

in a few days; a profound lassitude brought him to a surrender so complete that every member ceased to function, save the brain, which still crackled under the taunt of his rabid and unremitting criticism.

His old smile returned to his lips, turned now against himself. His wasted life, useless, misspent, deluded, full of insane generosity and fruitless bitterness, merited no more than a smile . . . his smile.

He gazed about him bewildered and lost, and heeded no one, not even his family. He met them with wide blank eyes, as if he saw them for the first time. Even in his children he was deceived and defeated. To what purpose the little wisdom, to what purpose the little light of fame that he had won for himself, studying by the glow of the lamp? Bernardo was violent and lustful, the terror of the young peasant girls of the surroundings; Ludovico, forever involved in intrigues and dubious transactions, had an affair with a courtesan named "la Pesciolina", who fleeced him of money and youth; little Guido was studious, but he played all the live-long day with altar-boys tainted with hypocrisy; Piero was of too tender years, and

Braccia was a good girl; but what could one do with a girl? No one had followed him, no one had understood him, not even in his own family. His example had been worth nothing. What does education amount to? A turn of fortune, and from father to son virtue warps and vanishes.

Nicolo felt the whole structure of his life crumbling like a house shaken by an earthquake. He put it from him like a gain, which suddenly seems false and ill-gotten.

He was never so near Christianity as in those days. But his detachment from the world was solaced by no hope of everlasting life. He was drained by a lassitude that penetrated his very soul and that found voice in the conviction of the absolute futility of the world and his own life. He had never found men good, no, but it had seemed to him an ideal worth fighting for to make them so, in their own despite, by the compulsion of laws and examples. Now, however, even glory seemed insubstantial, and he recalled the line of Dante:

Nought but a fleeting air the world's wide rumour. . . .

Thus the days fled, and none of the remedies prepared by his good Marietta availed to relieve him of that inner anxiety, which left him restless, sleepless, tossing on his aching pillow, deaf to all the world's rumour, save that which still roared within him. The few words which he could utter, the impossibility of finding an adequate expression for that inward distress, prevented his friends from understanding the torment and abandon into which he had fallen.

He was dying when they realized at last the gravity of his to them inexplicable distress, and he was inarticulate, when Fra Matteo was called in to administer the last sacraments.

This friar, half madman, half imbecile, had one day dropped the Crucifix down a well and was known throughout Florence for that egregious self-baptism.

As the final affront of his age to Nicolo Machiavelli, the spiritual solace of a poor idiot was offered to the greatest political mind of his time, for God-speed from a world he had labored so hard and with so much courage to understand and modify.

XIV

HIS SECOND LIFE

LEGEND is the reward awarded by History to the great to console them for their failure in life. By legend they realize often what they could not, in life, by genius.

Legend laid hold of Nicolo Machiavelli on his death-bed; and sweeping him on through the ages on its glamorous surf of glory and ignominy, it has now dilated and exalted him in an avatar appalling to one and auspicious to another.

Machiavelli has been hated, feared, denied, stoned, burned, honored and execrated, vaunted and sung, imitated and impeached, travestied and insulted: one he has clad and another cobbled and drilled like a picklock for a third; one, like an elixir, has sipped him, another, like a dram, has swilled him, a third, like a bartender, drawn him, a fourth brewed him in his own weak water. Machiavellis have been born by the dozen: one for the

Jesuits, one for the patriots, one for the philosophers, one for the encyclopædists, one for the Protestants, another for the Catholics, a third for the dilletante, a fourth for the student, a fifth for the rostrum and a sixth for the wedding-breakfast, and lastly, of all the best known, the Machiavelli of the imbeciles. A new vice has been born—Machiavellism; and Machiavelli would have said, You never got it from me. He has taught priests to rule and rulers to curb priestcraft. One fought him in public to con him in private. Autocrats ignored him, but by him they were legitimized; revolutions bore him a grudge, but their hearts raced at the sound of certain of his republican phrases. For many a rising youth his books became what those of the Latins had been for him; and the burning eyes that scanned them to discover the secret springs of action flashed, flamed, blazed, wept, but never once blinked, and when they closed, closed on a vision.

But after an underground life in secret drawers, forbidden files and public masquerades, he was really re-born to the light of day in the twentieth century, which was the era of nationalism,

the age of active *virtue,* and therefore Machiavelli's own, long-awaited and indisputable hour. He was reborn with his sardonic smile for the snivelling and the weak, the humane and the hesitating, the devout and the fawning. Once more he spoke his own Florentine tongue, even on alien lips. Once more he flung to the sun his banner, with the device he had written one day, with his finger dipped in indelible wine, on the table of an inn: prompting intrepidity, tripping up helpless prophets, fighting Fortune with unsubdued soul, bugling for heroes for the herd; ever prompt to appear wherever men labored for an Italy united, armed, and unfrocked.

We see him at Napoleon's ear, reminding him that he was born Italian and spurring him to raise the first national army, in the ranks of which Lombard and Venetian, Tuscan and Neapolitan, brothers-in-arms at last, muster once more to war a nation of dead men and ghosts. Then he persuades Murat to foster an enterprise, which ended ingloriously in the waters of the Potenza. He clasps hands with Pisacane, as he dictates to him the law of armed insurrection. He supports Victor Emman-

uel II, when that prince zealously declines to renounce the national Constitution, and draws all the hopes of Italian unity toward Piedmont. He was often in conference with Camillo Cavour, and it was he who proposed the participation of a Piedmontese brigade in the Crimean war and the choice of Rome as the capital of Italy. He entered Rome with Mazzini, but he fought shy of Garibaldi, for whom he held an antipathy; and his return to Rome was made on the arm of Cadorna, to the joyous sound of the cannon of Porta Pia. He tried to guide Crispi, whom he liked for his spirit of authority and bold policies; but he was not always heeded. He prepared for Salandra the declaration of war against Austria, and he was with Mussolini in the March on Rome. After which. . . .

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